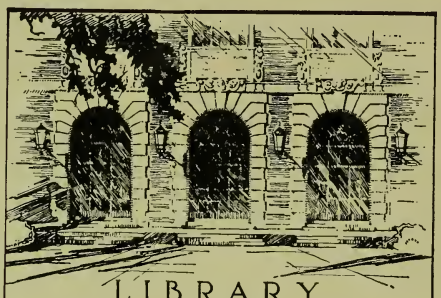
CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY

A Provincial Sketch

By the Author of

"CULMSHIRE FOLK"—"JOHN ORLEBAR"—Etc.



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CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY

"Euerie man dwellynge on this Æarth is a pilgrym eyther towardes Blesse or els towards Payne."—Sir JOHN OLDCASTLE.

"Human portraits faithfully drawn are of all pictures the welcomest."—THOMAS CARLYLE.

"Grief and joy and hope and fear
Play their pageants everywhere."
—THOMAS CAMPION.

CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY

A PROVINCIAL SKETCH

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'CULMSHIRE FOLK,'
'JOHN ORLEBAR,' 'THE YOUNG IDEA,'
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CONTENTS OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	BABY,	1
II.	GEORGIE PLAYS A TRUMP,	11
III.	GEORGIE SPEAKS OUT,	26
IV.	CONGRATULATORY,	37
V.	NEWS FROM THE FRONT,	53
VI.	AFTER LONG YEARS,	69
VII.	HARD HIT,	95
VIII.	ON THE ROAD AND OFF,	123
IX.	EXPLANATIONS,	150
X.	A SURPRISE,	169
XI.	DEVELOPMENTS,	199
XII.	PALLIDA MORS,	223
XIII.	SUMMING UP,	237
XIV.	FINAL,	243

CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY:

A PROVINCIAL SKETCH.

CHAPTER I.

BABY.

"Maxima debetur puero reverentia."
—JUVENAL.

BABY-WORSHIP is presumably the only form of idolatry which is winked at by the angels, and against which the Church has not entered a *caveat*. From considerations of expediency this is just as well, because when your orders are certain to be disregarded it is better not to issue them, or to insist where you have no power to enforce. Baby in

arms carries everything before him. The women who can lay no claim to him kneel and worship, while the proud proprietress condescends to exhibit him ("a lump of delight"), and with natural fear and trembling to hand him round for inspection.

Kate's was pronounced to be a wonderful baby; and as soon as she was able, she held a sort of continuous reception. Georgie and Lavinia were constant in their worship, of course. Mrs Quodlibet came, so did Mrs Fungus and her daughters. Even Georgie's mamma put in an appearance; and they, one and all, pronounced the same verdict—from which it would be presumptuous in me to differ. Nevertheless, I will say—except that he seemed to have been born with more hair than other babies, I myself saw no great difference. I confess I am a little prejudiced: I always avoid very young babies when it can be done without endangering my position in the regard of their

parents. As a rule, they strike me as being underdone, rare—in a sense other than the usual maternal acceptation of the term. My sympathies tend more towards appreciation of maturity; and worship began, in my case, when the object of it was at least eighteen: I never went behind that limit; and I am now a member of that Society of Antiquaries of which Father Time is president, and which may be said to boast a cosmopolitan list of compulsory members.

But to resume. In this particular instance even aunt Polly found herself "in the swim"—couldn't keep out of it.

In fact, so great was the excitement that there were moments—mind, I say only moments—when Kate forgot the father while contemplating the son; when Lavinia forgot the major; and Georgie forgot the game she had to play—all the same, she made no false move.

Tinkler himself, when he returned, became

unpleasantly alive to the conviction that he was more or less an outsider now; and he was only reconciled to the existing state of things when his claim to part-proprietorship was acknowledged by the honorary title of uncle, and by the information that he was to be allowed to stand sponsor in conjunction with Stole and Lavinia. Mrs Fungus so far showed her great interest as to promise that the ceremony of baptism should be performed by the Canon. Georgie came in, at her own special request, as a supplemental godmother.

There was the settlement of the Christian names, which had to be discussed. Hugh came first, because it was a Scottowe family name, then Adrian.

"Why Adrian?" Mrs Fungus inquired aside of Georgie.

"Oh, because it is the name of a very, very dear friend of theirs, who befriended Mr Tinkler and Kate in early life."

"Is he to be here? Is he dead?"

"Oh no, he's alive. He's coming back some day. He's away in New Zealand, I think. He has done a great deal of good over there—among the Huguenots."

"The what?" said Mrs Fungus.

"I mean the Hottentots," Georgie explained—"and that sort of thing."

"But, my dear, there are no Hottentots—or that sort of thing—in New Zealand that ever I heard of."

Georgie saw that she had made a slip, which she hastily corrected by explaining that she meant aborigines.

"Mrs Scottowe is a very favourable specimen of them at all events," continued Mrs Fungus.

This was too much! There was no smile on the old lady's countenance to intimate that she meant it for a joke, so Georgie had to explain.

"Of course she is not an aborigine. I

don't suppose you really think that." She dropped the final *s*, so as to get rid of the awkward plural; but she wasn't quite sure that it was all right.

"Then this Mr Adrian is a missionary?" queried the old lady.

"No, he's not," said Georgie; "he's a philanthropist, and his name is Adrian Verney. He's very rich—made it all out there."

"Thank you," said Mrs Fungus, as she took her leave.

"Oh, mamma, wasn't it really fine?" remarked Miss Ethel, when they got out of earshot. "Georgie's ignorance is simply colossal—perfectly delightful."

"Isn't Botany Bay somewhere out there?" said the mother, trying to put this and that together; "where they used to send the convicts to, long ago."

"Yes, it is—sure enough."

"I don't think so," said Dolly; "isn't it in Australia—or Van Diemen's Land?"

"They're all the same," Ethel explained, out of the fulness of her knowledge.

"There's something curious about it at all events," Dolly remarked. "I never saw brother and sister so unlike as Mr Tinkler and Mrs Scottowe. Though, for the matter of that, Joel isn't very like either of us."

"He is the picture of one of his grand-uncles," explained the mother; "he is a Lapsus—takes after my side of the house."

And truly Joel did "take after" that aristocratic black-leg, the Honourable Jervaise Lapsus, in more subtle ways than outward seeming.

The difficulty which Mrs Fungus had now to face was that of getting her lord to fulfil the promise which she had made in his behalf, as to performing the baptismal ceremony over this wonderful baby. She preferred to grapple with it single-handed, and to beard the lion in his den by herself. She dismissed her daughters, and entered his

study alone. He was in a very bad humour. The struggle was protracted, but at last she emerged victorious. Her arguments were that—seeing how things were going, and the leanings of the Bishop and his wife—it would be a good stroke of business and of polity to give in; but her arguments had not half as much weight as her persistency. He could not get rid of her without consenting, so he yielded at last, with a very bad grace.

She did not tell him that she had actually promised for him; because, if she had, he would, out of sheer perversity, have peremptorily declined to act—as a punishment for her presumption; and would have left her to get out of the difficulty as best she could. All's well that ends well, she thought, as she shut the door behind her, and left the Canon to complete his sermon.

His mode of performing the baptismal function was of a very trying nature; because, not content with the usual dipping

of the finger, he always made a cup of his hand, and poured the contents over the hapless infant; which, of course, resulted in lamentations and woe—the mother terrified lest her treasure should catch its death of cold, and the poor baby gasping, struggling, and shrieking, through the remainder of the service: this was the grim satisfaction which he expected for his pains.

But when Master Scottowe went through this ordeal, he bore it in such a way as to win the admiration of even the Canon himself. He gasped, to be sure, poor little fellow, because, when nearly choked, he could not help it; but he did not howl: on the contrary, he kicked with both feet, and struck out with his little doubled-up fists, in a way which seemed to intimate to the cruel Canon that he would "go for him" if only able; and which wrung from his persecutor the confession that he was "a fine little chap."

"And you don't know what a compliment that is," said Mrs Fungus to the mother, "coming from my husband, because he hates babies as a rule, and never christens them when he can avoid it; so you may consider yourself highly flattered and favoured, my dear."

"Oh, so I do," said Kate, "and I am ever so much obliged to him. But how can any one possibly hate babies? I think they are the dearest things in the wide, wide world."

I have heard other women say the same thing; but still, there are males to be found who entertain the unnatural sentiment with which the Canon was accredited by his wife.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGIE PLAYS A TRUMP.

"I cannot give you an idea of the joy we have when we see a man turning fool for our sakes."—*Spectator.*

"The Syren's song is the sayler's wrack."—STEPHEN GOSSON.

THE Westerly gift to the Rev. Joseph Tinkler included now, in addition to the originally contemplated purse of sovereigns, a very nice turn-out of horse, harness, and trap. The presentation function went off most satisfactorily; and Dr Quodlibet was so good as to mark his sense of the importance of it by expressing a wish that it should take place at the palace, and that Tinkler and the deputation should remain to lunch.

This lunch included ladies, among whom was Georgie. He would be starting for

what the Bishop called "his new sphere of duty" very shortly, and "would leave a void not easily filled in the hearts of his old parishioners."

The words were very nice and very true, and Georgie felt that there was no time to be lost. If she let him go without declaring himself, there was no knowing what might or might not happen.

That evening, after dinner, her father having to attend a patient some miles out of town, took her in his brougham to see Kate, and dropped her at the door of Tinkler's lodgings. She was such a frequent visitor that she was expected, even if there had not been the special event of the day to talk about. Lavinia had only just left, after offering her congratulations. Tinkler himself opened the door for Georgie. If she hadn't come he would have been sorely disappointed — it was such an exceptional day.

Everything favoured and suggested prompt action on her part. She knew where her strong point lay. In affairs of the heart the influence of music stands supreme. You might doubt this if only poets said so, calling it the "food of love" and all that sort of thing; but sober scientific men bear like testimony—even stronger. Ritter maintains that there is electricity in it; and I remember reading that in Arcadia there was a section of the community the members of which, because they banished music from their schools, became the most cruel and wicked of all the Greeks. Doubtless Shakespeare had these in his mind when he declared such men to be fit for "treason, stratagem, and spoils." Terpander, we are told, stopped sedition among the Lacedæmonians by introducing music; and with such results as to quite over-cure the evil, because subsequently their dash in battle had to be softened by tunes of a

soothing nature: in fact Terpander overdid it by the power of music. Experts say—or have said—that fevers were cured by it, deafness, even madness, epilepsy, sciatic gout, — and I know not what beside. It meant simply *loca dolentia decantare* — to bewitch the affected place. But enough; if not, I must respectfully refer the incredulous reader to the Transactions of the Academy of Science, where he will find exhaustive papers on the subject; to Capella; and to Dr Bianchini, Professor of Physic, who wrote a book devoted entirely to the subject—which I haven't read.

For our purpose it will suffice to say that a man more susceptible to the power of music than Joseph Tinkler did not exist. Anything connected with it interested him, even a dry discussion as to whether the ancients possessed counterpoint. The actual thing entranced him. You could knock him down with a solo, and utterly subjugate

him with a recitative. He would, under the spell, sway to and fro on his seat, at times even endangering his equilibrium. I have spoken before of the craze he had for collecting musical instruments of all ages, kinds, and climes, and of the goodly assortment which he possessed. When Kate came to stay with him he added a grand piano on hire; and it was to this, in conjunction with her own sweet voice, that Georgie looked for victory. She soon had him in the seventh heaven—in an ideal region of beauty, melody, and sweet sounds, called into existence by hands of exquisite touch, and eyes of unfathomable depth.

He felt shy and diffident at first, as if either doubting the reality of it all, or his own worthiness to be the recipient of so much ecstasy; and it was this diffidence which needed the nicest management on the part of Georgie.

The robin will perch within a few inches

of you, while you go on potting your geraniums; but if you hold out your hand with a grub or try to catch the bird, or even to put salt on his tail, he will dash himself terror-stricken against the conservatory glass, or be out through the open door.

Cuteness and shyness are often confounded: they may keep an equal distance from you — measured by feet and inches; but they are miles apart when you come to deal with them. Cuteness can reason, and be convinced, and can put this and that together, and act on the compound experience; but timidity is hard to teach, and as hard to get into a cage as the other.

Georgie encouraged Tinkler in every possible way. She had him to stand by her, to lean over her, to turn leaves, to hunt up pieces of music in the portfolios, — sometimes on her knees she helped him. She

even rallied him for being silly in overlooking something he wanted to find; and while Kate laughed, it made him happy.

Georgie played everything he wanted, and then—she suddenly burst into song.

I don't know what sort of a voice it was from a professional point of view — being utterly ignorant in these matters — but I know that it was simply magnificent: it insinuated itself, and then it ran riot, and simply played the mischief with you somehow—thrilled through you—kept you under a spell. I don't wonder that Tinkler came to grief — or rather, dropped into felicity. At all events his hour had come, and he was face to face with his destiny — and a very pretty face it was.

Georgie sang several songs; but I think the one that finished him was "Doctor Cupid," which I here present. I say this because it was the one he asked for a second time as a wind-up, when she had looked at

her watch, and said something about the hour being late :—

1.

"I have doubts that come and go;
Thoughts that please
Yet tease
Me so.
Doctor Cupid, can you tell
How to break the magic spell?
What it means I do not know.
When shall I recover?
Now I'm well,
And now am ill;
Glad betimes, at others wailing.
What is this that moves me so?
Every guess is unavailing.
When shall I discover?
Not a reason can I find.
Doctor Cupid,
You are kind;
Am I stupid,
Or so *very*, VERY blind?

2.

Why, of course!—The heart's affected
By your sore distress;
But a lover
May recover
Even though rejected:
That's the worldly way.

Many come and many go—
All must catch the fever;
And the cure, though it be slow,
Makes a staunch believer.
There's a 'Yes'
Behind the 'No':
Wait, and you'll discover.

3.

But when fickle ones forget
Is there no redress?
Reassure me!
How to cure me,
Doctor Cupid, say!
Oh, disenchant!
Or, if you can't,
Yet—
Till I'm better—stay!
I will give thee heart and soul,
I will give thee mind and will;
Doctor Cupid, reassure—
Either kill,
Or quickly cure!"

As she finished, the fingers rested lingeringly on the keys of the instrument, the head fell back, and the lustrous eyes looked full into the enamoured face of Joseph.

Is there a subtle freemasonry among

women, or did Kate really hear the baby cry? She said she did; and she flew upstairs just at this moment with a speed which seemed to imply conviction: why then should I doubt?

Georgie rose, blew out the piano candles, as young ladies sometimes will, and then suddenly made the alarming discovery that the room was in semi-darkness—depending only on the fire-light.

"Oh, how stupid of me!" she exclaimed. "I forgot that the gas was not lighted."

No doubt she had forgotten, but all the same, when Tinkler proposed to light it she put him off, unless he wished for the "additional glare," which, of course, he didn't; he preferred the subdued mellow tint from the fire, which sent its quivering wedge-shaped shadows from chair and table legs off into the distant corners of the room, causing a mysterious gloom. The blaze

about the hearth made that spot all the brighter by contrast.

The sofa stood in front of the fender, placed there by the good-natured landlady, for the comfort and convenience of Kate and the baby.

Georgie seated herself upon it—up near the pillow, and Tinkler ventured on at the other end. After a few commonplaces, the whole thing came about in this way:—

"I shall miss you very much—very soon," he said, with a sigh.

"Ah!" responded Georgie with another, "and don't you think I shall miss you—and Kate, dear Kate? It is just the way of the world. As soon as one forms real friendships, something happens to break them up or to interfere with them, and——" The sentence was left unfinished, save by another sigh.

I said it all came about in this way—and so it did. Tinkler got gradually closer

to Georgie, and — it all followed then as a matter of course. Georgie knew it was coming before it did come; and it gradually dawned upon Tinkler that hesitation and reserve had had their day. I could not tell what particular word or look or action or sigh convinced him. It was a subtle something that only the interested persons understood; not to be defined, and quite inexplicable to the outsider, who only notes the result. If I see a lady looking into a shop-front, I can always tell whether she is admiring herself or examining the goods; but what the indications are that lead me to form an unerring conclusion I never could define. To apply this—I suppose that, looking through the eyes into the heart, the lover can tell on what the loved one's mental vision is concentrated.

Be all this vain speculation and surmise as it may, in less than five minutes Tinkler's fondest hopes were established on a firm

basis. His arm got round Georgie's trim little waist, and when she put up her hand to protect her heart, she found it made prisoner without any attempt to release it. How long this state of things lasted I am not going to tell; nor will I enter more minutely into detail: suffice it to say that, when Kate returned, she was rapturously kissed by both.

"I knew it!" she said, "I knew it—this, ever so long!"

"How could you?" asked the simple Tinkler, "when I didn't know it myself?"

"Never mind—I did. I am delighted. You dear Georgie! Oh! isn't it nice?"

Georgie acquiesced.

"And we'll always be friends."

"Always," assented Georgie.

"And you'll have to call him Joe! Have you begun? Isn't it funny?"

Tinkler didn't see the fun; and Georgie would rather the name had been any

other than Joe: but this was a small matter.

"And, Joe, you'll have to call her Georgie." Kate spoke as if these were wonderful discoveries.

"Yes, of course—Georgie." Tinkler ventured on the experiment diffidently, and in a tentative sort of way, as if anxious to test the sound of it coming from his own mouth; and being satisfied with the result, he took courage and kissed her on the forehead.

Just then the landlady knocked, and announced that the doctor had sent the brougham to fetch Georgie, and there had to be a parting, as a matter of course.

"We won't say one word till papa knows," she said, kissing Kate; and then gracefully submitting to another kiss from Tinkler (still on the forehead), she hurried down-stairs, and was off before the happy parson had time to do more than follow. The fact

was, she did not want the coachman to know too much. A motion of the hand from the carriage-window up to Kate, who was peering through a corner of the blind, and she was gone.

CHAPTER III.

GEORGIE SPEAKS OUT.

"A woman moved is like a fountain troubled."
—SHAKESPEARE.

"The common lot which all the world have known,
To her 'tis more—because her heart is lonely."
—HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

I SUPPOSE it was to kill thought that Georgie hummed the words of "Doctor Cupid" to herself as she drove home.

Now, madam, if you are the happy mother of daughters, you will perhaps say that her conduct was not—all through this business—"quite the thing," and that she simply made "a dead set" at Joseph Tinkler, and manœuvred for a husband. Well, you might admit that she only did what her mother should have done for her, and which you,

with a proper sense of your responsibility, feel it your duty to do for your own girls. And, moreover, you are large-minded and generous enough not to be jealous of your husband, because of his affection for any one of those charming daughters—all of whom are so fortunate as to command a sympathy denied to Georgie. Take all these things into account, and judge her accordingly.

I say unhesitatingly that Joseph Tinkler was a most fortunate fellow to have secured a wife who would be all that a true and faithful woman should be. He was not her ideal, but she would never hurt his self-love by letting him know it; and if he had searched the world over, he would have searched it in vain for one less likely to give him future cause for regret. She was a woman whose qualities would "wear well" in the highest sense of the word, and who would never ask a bigger sacrifice at his

hands than giving up the most unbecoming habit of playing the flute. I don't find fault with her for that, because he really had a nice mouth, and it was a pity to see him distort it over a piece of stick.

When Georgie got home, she rushed at once to the drawing-room, where she expected to find her mother sitting up for her.

"Well, it's all over, mamma!" she exclaimed; "I have done it—or he has—or we both have!"

"I don't understand you," said Mrs Collyrium, taking her feet off the fender, and smoothing down her petticoats.

"Well—Mr Tinkler has asked me to marry him, and—I'm going to: that's all."

"The levity with which you refer to so solemn a matter pains me, and has frequently, as you very well know, pained me."

"There is no levity about it now, mamma; it is serious enough, and at all events true —which is the chief thing."

"I hope Mr Tinkler will never regret it," she said with icy coldness, which stung poor Georgie like a frost-bite. She had gone through many years of self-repression in order to keep from open war with her mother, and now the time was nearly come when they would cease to clash. But this speech cut her to the soul. Under the circumstances she thought she might have fairly looked for a mild compliment, or at least a harmless insincerity, with some semblance of kindness in it. What wonder if she flared up!

"No, mamma! I am very much obliged to you, of course; but he won't find any cause to regret. I'll tell you why, since you have such an interest in him. When he comes home after his day's work, I won't sit silently by the fire and mope. I won't make believe that I'm injured if he isn't in good spirits. I'll fuss about and have everything nice for him—warmed up with

a smile. I won't go in for silence and resignation as a virtue and a duty, when I should chatter and laugh, and when there is no cause for low spirits except what comes from sitting down to hatch grievances. He won't be tied to a wife who only cares to talk and make herself agreeable to visitors."

"Indeed!" said Mrs Collyrium.

"Yes," continued Georgie, "I mean to profit by experience. I want my husband to think me nice; and—I don't care much what anybody else may think."

"Very creditable, I am sure," remarked her mother.

"I don't mean to say that I shall be disagreeable to other people; but I do mean to say that—my house will be a different one from—yours."

"Don't you think you might have made mine somewhat different, Georgie?" Mrs Collyrium inquired, with a look of cold injury.

Georgie paused. "Yes," she replied; "perhaps I could, if I liked to fight with you. But then, things would only have been made hotter for papa—that's all."

"Perhaps you had better go to bed; you have kept me up very late as it is," said Mrs Collyrium.

"Yes, perhaps I had. I won't trouble you much longer, thank goodness! Of course there will be a certain amount of bother which can't be helped. If I could avoid it I would; but I don't see how I can. At all events, the wedding-breakfast will end it; and I hope we'll be better friends when I am gone."

"You had better, as I said, go to bed, and leave these unpleasant remarks till morning, when you are in a calmer frame of mind."

"Oh, all right, mamma: good night."

And Georgie, with a bursting heart, rushed up-stairs. The tension was too much for her, and she did not wish that

her mother should have the triumph of seeing her break down. There was a light under the bedroom door, which showed that the doctor was there. She knocked, expecting to find him in bed reading—as usual.

"Holloa, child!" he exclaimed, looking up from his book.

Georgie literally rushed at him, and had her arms round his neck in an instant.

"Papa! papa!" she exclaimed, "I have just told mamma that it is all over at last. I'm going away from you. Are you glad too? I'm going to be married to Mr Tinkler. My little scheme has—come true."

"God bless my soul, Georgie! I'm not glad—that is, for myself; but you will be happy, I have no doubt, and for your own sake I am glad."

"Well, I'll tell you all about it to-morrow, dear old man! It will cost you such a lot of money; but it can't be helped, and

it won't happen often — at least I hope not."

"Don't talk like that, you little goose!" he said, kindly, "or I'll get up and give you a dose. Kiss me again, and don't be excited, or you'll certainly have to get a nasty draught to calm your nerves."

Then there was a fervent, long, and silent embrace; till, hearing her mother's footstep on the stairs, Georgie fled to her own room, and threw herself on the bed, face downwards.

Shall we say, "Poor Georgie"?

There is a prevailing belief that the tears of men are pitiful, but that those of women are merely curative, and not deserving of any compassion. A cynical old clergyman, in his 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' goes even so far as to say that one should take as little heed of a weeping woman as of a goose going barefoot. I don't agree with him; and even if I did, I should be ashamed

to acknowledge it. Such sweeping generalities are always wrong when applied to particular cases.

Undoubtedly there are females who can, and do, cry without adequate emotional cause — constitutionally damp ones, whose chief pleasure in life seems to be to enwrap themselves in a social wet blanket, and to live in a state of domestic influenza, which, though it may not be contagious, yet nevertheless has a most depressing effect on those around them. They resent sympathy in a stand-off sort of way, which seems to imply that they are of a sensitive and suffering nature which you do not understand,—you are so coarse-grained, so healthy, so hard, and so unsympathetic. Then, on the other hand, if you do not express some commiseration, they are offended, and the dampness comes on with redoubled force —so that really you don't quite know what to do.

But to return to Georgie. I think she has a large claim on our consideration. She loved her father—of that there was no doubt; and perhaps—who knows?—she may have felt that she did not love Tinkler with that fervour and fulness of which every young girl's heart is capable. If she had been happy at home, things might have turned out differently; but from a worldly point of view she was doing well, and her determination to make a good and faithful wife sustained her.

She went to bed, and slept a good sound honest sleep after the fit was over. But Mrs Collyrium kept the doctor awake far into the night, and long after his large stock of patience had been exhausted. Finally he said—

"Well, my dear, we can't alter matters now—if we tried to; and even if we could, I don't see that we ought: it is gone too far. All we have to do is to go through with

it creditably, and to make the child as happy over it as we can."

"I will hope for the best," said the wife of his bosom, "and will pray for a blessing."

"Oh, blessing be hanged!" said the doctor —but this was *sotto voce*. A medical man of his standing and reputation could hardly be expected to put up with a clinical lecture, even from his wife, with himself in the dual capacity of audience and patient.

CHAPTER IV.

CONGRATULATORY.

"He is well paid that is well satisfied,
And I am satisfied,
And therefore do account myself well paid."
—SHAKESPEARE.

"Little joy have I
To breathe these news, yet what I say is true."
—*Ibid.*

TINKLER'S interview with the doctor, when next morning he went to discuss the momentous question which had so suddenly cropped up, was of a most satisfactory character. He merely called to ask for Georgie as a free gift, and nothing more. He did not mean to bargain or haggle over pounds, shillings, and pence, considering himself most fortunate and amply rewarded by securing the paternal consent. There-

fore he was agreeably surprised when he learned during the progress of the interview that she would have, while her father lived, an ample yearly allowance, and at his death would become—as was natural—his sole heir.

"I have nobody else to leave it to, Tinkler," said the doctor; "and of course she gets all, subject to a provision for her mother. Georgie will have a good man for a husband, and I am satisfied, and very thankful; but I'm sorry she is going, all the same. I grudge her to you, Tinkler."

"That is only to be expected, sir."

"Well, it is. We will not be strangers, however."

"I hope not," said Tinkler. "Please God, we'll often see you at the rectory, where you will be ever welcome."

They were holding each other's hand all this time.

"Mind," the doctor said at parting, "I don't distinctly say that I may not make

some change, by-and-by, in my will; but this doubtful point need not seriously trouble you as my son-in-law. The change would be merely that I might give Georgie and you a life-use only, with reversion to one or more of your children, as the fit may take me."

"I only want your daughter, sir," explained the happy lover. "You have agreed to trust her to my keeping, and you may do as you like about money matters — everything touching the disposition of your property is entirely in your own hands. I am to-day fortunate beyond my deserts; and I feel truly thankful."

He went away without explaining whether his gratitude was given to Providence or to the doctor, or equally to both. Tinkler was not sordid; and as he shut the study door behind him, his heartfelt prayer was that the doctor might live to a ripe old age. He felt no curiosity to know how much his future wife was to get annually, or how his

father-in-law was ultimately likely to "cut up." He asked no questions as to settlements, and was supremely happy in the prospect of possessing the object of his affections, and in realising his supremest anticipations of mundane felicity.

There was no hitch later on. Mrs Collyrium—whom he always rather feared—was melancholy, but resigned and complacent; and this was as much as he could expect.

"Did you kiss mamma when you were coming away?" asked Georgie in the hall, where she had been watching for him.

Good gracious, no! The idea never entered the head of the unpresuming Joseph; and he looked at Georgie, quite puzzled, but without making answer.

"But you know you ought to," she explained; "you'll have to get into the way of kissing your mother-in-law. Come back with me now and make a beginning." She was amused at his perplexity.

"Oh no—not now—not to-day," said Joseph; "I think I'll be content with a substitute. Look here, Georgie—you'll come over—to Kate—in the evening, won't you? There is ever so much to—talk about." And here he looked about him furtively and nervously, as if the presence of a third party just then would not be too gratefully acknowledged or received.

Here I turn my back upon them, and leave them while—Georgie sees him out.

The news of the engagement spread with astounding rapidity, though no one could trace the source from which it started. The evening papers got hold of it, and paraded the information in largest print. It went all over the town in "less than no time." I believe myself that Kate, in the fulness of her joy, let out the secret to her landlady, who was in the habit of coming in to admire the baby; and that, in this way, it got wind. But she was not herself

conscious of having mentioned the fact, and was quite as puzzled as Georgie to account for its publicity. However, as Tinkler said, it didn't really matter, as it would have to be known soon, in any case.

Congratulations poured in upon him and Georgie from every quarter. He had no idea till now how popular he was in Westerly. The presentation made some time ago disclosed a great deal, but nothing to what was made manifest by the knowledge that he was about to be married to Georgie. A thrill of general and lively interest pervaded the community — the happy event touched so many chords of sympathy. Of course the wedding would be a big affair, as the doctor was known to be a large-hearted man, and rich. It would benefit the shopkeepers — milliners, jewellers, confectioners — everybody. Wedding presents had to be got; and there was great specula-

tion as to when the wedding would take place, who were to be invited to it, and who would be Georgie's bridesmaids.

When Canon Fungus got his paper, and saw the announcement, he took it in to his wife, neatly folded; and with his finger marking the exact spot, called her attention to it. He watched the effect with a sense of enjoyment and a grim smile.

"Well! the artfulness of it all!" exclaimed Mrs Fungus. "Just fancy!"

"I am not a highly imaginative person, my dear," explained the Canon; "would you mind enlightening me a bit?"

"My goodness!—can't you see?"

"See what?"

"Why—that the whole thing was planned. They might have told us before, and not have let us in for a second expense. The one subscription would have done for both events, if we had only known about this in time. Now we'll have to put our hands

in our pockets a second time, to buy presents. It is most annoying to be taken in so palpably by such a chit of a thing as that Georgie."

"May I ask," said the Canon, with childlike simplicity, "are you sympathising with Tinkler—when you so express yourself?"

"I am not!" she replied, tartly; "what do I care about him?"

The Canon was drawing his badger. "Oh," he said, "I beg pardon. You see, the sentence was open to the charitable interpretation which I put upon it."

"Nonsense! what sympathy could he want, I should like to know? He will come in for everything, as a matter of course; and they say that the doctor is worth thousands and thousands. Tinkler isn't half such a fool as he looks. I must say that, as a class, I think clergymen are the most sordid people in the world. I never met one that didn't know very well on which

side his bread was buttered." The Canon felt the charge to be unjust.

"Do you think," he asked, with a bland smile, "that this peculiarity is exclusively confined to us, my dear? Are there not, within your own knowledge, some honourable exceptions—not one even?" and he smiled an insinuating but sinister smile.

She looked at him, and took in the bearings of the question at a glance. He got no money with her, when years ago he elected to choose her as his wife, and this she very well knew; but he wasn't going to have an argumentative walk over, or to put her down with a sneer, for all that.

"If they don't actually go in for money," she continued, "they go in for something else — high connections and good family influence—which comes to the same thing in the end, remember that." The Lapsus blood was up, and he got a Roland for his Oliver. "One thing is certain now, at all

events—namely, that you'll have to put your hand in your pocket to give presents to the bride and bridegroom; and as we are sure to be asked to the breakfast, both the girls and myself will require new gowns and bonnets and what not,—so you may prepare yourself for a pretty considerable outlay. I must call to-morrow on Mrs Collyrium, to congratulate her and Georgie."

The comic element being exhausted, the Canon beat a hasty and ignominious retreat, and meditated, in the solitude of his study, upon the more serious side of the picture.

Mrs Fungus was always equal to the occasion, and when a thing had to be done, she lost no time in doing it. She was one of the very first to pay her congratulatory visit. She embraced Georgie most cordially —kissing her again and again, and telling her what a nice bride she would make, and how greatly delighted the Canon and the girls were about it all. The result was,

that she returned with a verbal invitation for her two daughters to act as bridesmaids. Georgie did not know yet how many she should have; but these two Fungus girls were the first in the running, and she would take no refusal from such old friends. Mrs Fungus was to tell her daughters all this, and Georgie would consider the matter settled.

Incredible as it may appear, Mrs Collyrium contrived to make herself as disagreeable as possible during her daughter's last few weeks in the house; and she did it in a way peculiar to women of her character and temperament — namely, by conveying the impression that she was slighted and made little of by husband and child. Yet, if Georgie wished to consult her on the thousand and one points connected with her wedding outfit, she was met by the cold reply — "Oh, don't mind me! Please yourself, Georgie. Your father has

always let you have your own way. You know very well my opinion hasn't much weight." Then when poor Georgie, thrown on her own resources, ventured to act independently, the adverse opinion came out with full force—when it was too late to do anything beyond giving annoyance. "If you had asked me before you selected that colour, I could have told you that it was most unbecoming," and so on. According to her mother, Georgie bought the wrong things, selected the wrong colours, went to the wrong shops—in fact, acted generally in a most idiotic and reckless way. But then she was her own mistress; and "If your father does not choose to interfere, why should I, Georgie?" would be the final question.

"But, mamma," the daughter would say, in her despair, "why do you always keep on saying that? Why can't you interfere? I want you to interfere, if you will. I

have asked you, and begged of you, over and over again, and you won't."

No; Mrs Collyrium preferred to give her opinion always when it was too late. "It didn't matter," she maintained; and there was more satisfaction in this course, which left her free to lead up to it by sighs, and by a melancholy comportment meant to convey the impression that her child looked down upon her as a nonentity, and that her husband had become utterly indifferent.

There are matrons who will hardly believe in this portraiture of Mrs Collyrium; but, on the other hand, I have no doubt that there are fathers who will recognise the truthfulness of it. I have been told by the mother of a large family of boys and girls, that these disagreeably peculiar characteristics are always and only to be found in the case of a woman who has only one child, and that child a daughter. This may be true: I hope it is.

Fortunately, on this momentous occasion of which we treat, Georgie was not without some one to consult with. If her mother threw her over, she still had Kate and Lavinia; so that, on the whole, she got on very satisfactorily to herself. She wanted the latter to be a bridesmaid, but Lavinia declared that nothing would induce her to fill that honourable and honorary post. The three daughters of old Dean Markham of Wraxeter stepped into the breach, and a distant cousin made up a sixth, so that this difficulty was also got over.

But what pleased and flattered Georgie hugely was an intimation, conveyed in the kindliest way possible by the Bishop, through Stole, both to Tinkler and the doctor, that it would give him pleasure to take part in the ceremony. His openly declared partiality for the bridegroom had caused, and was causing, jealousy and heart-burnings among the clergy, there was no doubt; but Georgie

knew nothing of it, nor did Tinkler dream of suspecting it. It is not every day that a girl can be married by a Bishop: no wonder if she felt a bit elated.

The wedding was to come off in five weeks, and there was much to be done; but when one's heart is in the work, it is quite astonishing how one rises to the occasion. Her generous father put no limit to her expenditure, believing that she would not abuse his trust and confidence by foolish extravagance. He was determined that she should get as much happiness and gratification out of these preliminaries as was possible. The only drop of gall in the cup was administered by her mother: if she had been affectionate and interested for these last few weeks, Georgie would have forgiven and forgotten the disagreeable past. But this was not to be. Even the doctor came in for a double share as well as Georgie. The horrible injustice of it made him bleed inwardly;

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but to reason with such a woman would be useless.

How curious it all was! He was used to it now, after many years. Yet he had married this woman for love—and, strange to say, she loved him still; but it was the love of a selfish and jealous nature, which found gratification in assuming the *rôle* of a martyr without the shadow of foundation, and yet repudiated all sympathetic overtures, and hugged the slights which were her own imaginings.

When Georgie was gone, perhaps things might be different, he thought; but would they be pleasanter or more bearable? This was a speculation which it was as well not to enter upon. The vague uncertainty of the future frightened him, and he did not care to pry into it.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS FROM THE FRONT.

"On the other hand it will, I know, be contended that war is not all loss."—Sir Arthur Helps.

"But they were sad ere day was done,
Though love was still the lord of all."
—Scott.

So in due time—the course of Tinkler's true love having run very smoothly indeed—that period arrived from which the honeymoon may safely be presumed to date; when the happy couple, having escaped out of the hands and from the gaze of friends, have started on their first journey together; when the walking-stick and the parasol have got together too, wrapped in the one rug, strapped for better for worse with the same strap, and repose peacefully in the rack of

a first-class railway carriage, while the owners——

Well, they have secured a compartment to themselves which is "engaged": we must not enter, nor seek to play the part of Paul Pry through the windows. Let us not destroy all romance by too minute and prosaic particularity, but rather leave something to the imagination, and wish the happy couple lifelong agreement and felicity.

The reverse of the picture was not far to seek; for hardly a week had passed when the excitement caused by the events which we have narrated was eclipsed by news which roused the enthusiasm not only of Westerly, but of the country at large. The war was practically at an end. The daily papers announced a decisive victory—a complete rout of the enemy—and the capture and subsequent death of King Cocoa:—"The brunt of the fighting was borne by the gallant 201st, which distinguished itself as of

old by its steadiness under fire, and its irresistible dash in the final charge. The enemy displayed the greatest pertinacity and courage, but was unable to cope with the cold steel at close quarters. The attack was in the nature of a surprise, after a brilliant forced march by our men, and resulted in the annihilation of King Cocoa's warriors and his own death. Our loss numbered—Major Sparke, Captains Garth and Jenner, and seventy-three rank and file, including four non-commissioned officers. Major Tynte was slightly wounded, and Lieutenant Bateman was severely hit, but not dangerously." So ran the first despatch from the seat of war.

It may be surmised that Lavinia was deeply interested, and awaited, with intense anxiety, some further news. She could not hope for a letter for weeks to come, but the telegraphic messages relieved her from suspense, in a few days, by stating that the

wounded were doing well, and that Major Tynte had resumed duty, and was going with the regiment to put down some smouldering elements of trouble which existed in adjoining territory before returning to England. Lieutenant Bateman was invalided, and ordered home with a detachment of the sick and disabled.

But if Lavinia was relieved, poor Kate was racked by doubts, forebodings, and uncertainty, and by alternating hopes and fears. Fate is unpitiful! At last a letter came to Lavinia from the major, and in it was the crushing news of the death of Hugh Scottowe —killed in action!

It was a terrible thing for Lavinia to have to convey the mournful tale to the tender and delicate young widow; and how she nerved herself to the task I cannot tell, nor do I care to dwell upon the grief and misery which overwhelmed both: it was a heart-rending picture to contemplate. What a

mercy it was that the baby was there to give comfort to the stricken mother! I verily believe that but for him she would have lost her reason. The major's letter said that Bateman, who was on his way home, would tell all on his return, and had promised on landing to go at once to Westerly.

After the first violent paroxysms of grief had swept over her, there was a sad consolation to Kate in looking forward to Bateman's arrival; but she could not expect to see him for a long time yet. Fortunately and most opportunely another source of comfort cropped up. She received the looked-for letter from her friend and former benefactor, Adrian Verney. He was settling his affairs in the distant colony, and would soon be on his way to England. He was full of kindliness and sympathy. The passages in which he alluded to the prospect of seeing his adopted daughter once again, and befriending her

husband and herself, of course let loose the flood-gates of her grief; but there was healing in them nevertheless. Him she did not even remember, and knew only by repute and infrequent correspondence; and by the love and regard which her brother — who remembered him—entertained, based on the knowledge that to this man they both in early life owed everything.

The sad turn which events had taken shortened the Tinkler honeymoon, and hurried Georgie home. Then Kate and the baby were taken off at once to Scottowe Rectory with the faithful Bridget, a little Irish nurse and soldier's orphan, picked up for her by the landlady. This relieved Lavinia from the great strain which her generous nature had had to undergo; and yet, when Kate had gone, she felt a void as if something had been taken out of her life.

She fell back upon Pipperly, and was more

exacting than ever in urging him to complete the purchase on which she had set her heart. The soldier was dead, but the woman whom she had undertaken to befriend was living still, and the little boy who bore the dead man's name. Doubtless the major's interest in this boy would now be strong; and for the major's sake she would go through with her resolve. Adrian Verney was rich, and his letter showed that he meant to maintain his character for benevolence; but what turn that benevolence might take she did not know; and all Pipperly could do to persuade her to wait and see was useless: she would not listen. He had to start off to London first; and then, on his return, he had of course to see the place he was negotiating to purchase.

It was a complicated business, as he found when he had mastered the documentary and legal details. In addition to a ruinous debt on the place, it appeared that by some

curious testamentary process it reverted after the death of the last baronet to the male heir of some distant branch who had, in anticipation, sold the reversion. The representatives of the purchaser were scattered: some were dead, some were living, and some were supposed to be dead. The process of "hunting up" had been a tedious one, and had taken many years; but at last conflicting interests had been focussed, and an arrangement come to by which it became possible to sell, and thus to realise whatever remained to be realised by the sale of the house and estate. Private offers would now be received and be "submitted to the Court." Pipperly was the first in the field, and the London solicitors, pending the receipt of his bid, had sent down directions to the lady in charge of the house to give him every facility. The furniture and pictures were to go with the place or not, as his client might determine. Lavinia sent

him down with strict injunctions to purchase everything as it stood. He was not hampered in any way, and from what he heard of the extent and value of the whole concern, he was well aware that Lavinia's wealth was equal to a bigger strain. The family portraits—which under other circumstances might have "gone high," were not likely to do so when the family was extinct, and the painters were not men of any great note.

Pipperly was wide awake. He hoped to get the place cheap—since he must get it; and he saw in the distance a remunerative resale to Adrian Verney; so that on the whole he was in good spirits as he took his departure. He put up at a village inn, some few miles away, and drove over. The place was, beyond doubt, charming, and not by any means in bad repair. He found himself very much interested in the "lady in charge," for Mrs West was undoubtedly

a lady, and one for whom he could not but entertain feelings of respect rather than pity —she, in fact, commanded it without effort, and secured it without protest. He flattered himself that she rather liked him, after the ice was broken, and he certainly succeeded better with her than Tinkler did —I mean in the matter of conversation; for there was a certain friendliness about him, and a sympathetic manner, which, while it was unobtrusive, yet invited confidence where he did not seem to seek it. But he did not learn much after all. She had been a governess for many years. The head of the family in which she last filled this situation was a great lawyer, and having influence in the right direction he exerted it in order to obtain for her the temporary post which she now filled, and which she sought for rest and quiet of mind and body. Of course she could not expect to remain, and would probably have to resume her

former occupation when the place was sold, but till then——

Mr Pipperly bowed, and assured her that she should be put to as little inconvenience as possible by him and his client — if the place became hers. Mrs West did not know till then that Scottowe was likely to pass into the ownership of a lady; so Pipperly sat down and told her about Lavinia, and the major, and Kate, and the baby Scottowe, and the absurd sentiment which prompted her to buy. Looking afterwards for a concurrence of opinion on the part of Mrs West, he was met by one diametrically opposed to his own, and which puzzled him as coming from a sensible woman of the world, who must have seen something of its ups and downs. He concluded that she would have taken his own view of the matter; and he was completely thrown out in his reckoning by her pronounced admiration for Lavinia.

"Such women are rare, indeed," said Mrs West.

Pipperly agreed that they were, but could not help adding that it was just as well, because they were certainly most upsetting from a business point of view.

He remained several days, in order to master all the bearings of the case intrusted to him, and to arrive at an approximate idea of the value of the property. Then he had to hurry off to London again, taking Westerly on his way, in order to report progress. Much time was lost in passing to and fro, and more was lost in solicitors' offices and in interviews and consultations with barristers and what not.

Lavinia was growing impatient, when the appearance of Lieutenant Bateman created a diversion in Pipperly's favour. He was greatly changed and pulled down, as might have been expected—looking thin and walking lame, not having yet got over his wound,

for which he made apology, as though he ought to be ashamed of it; then she heard full particulars about the major's also.

"An ugly prod, by Jove! Miss Harman —in the shoulder, from one of those spears, you know, that the fellows throw. Of course the major made precious little of it, and stuck to his work all through. He'll be none the worse when he comes home — in fact he was all right before I left. I'm sorry I can't stay; but I promised him faithfully, after I saw you, that I would not delay calling on poor Hugh's widow. I have got some trinkets and things of his that Tynte wished me to bring home; and I'll have to give her an account of the poor chap's death. He made precious short work of the black fellow that struck Tynte, and of five or six others, before he fell. But there is no use in going into these details to you, now it's all over. I don't know how I'll

ever manage to get through with the painful business; but I'll have to—somehow. I'd really rather face the enemy in the field—lame leg and all; I'm such a fool at—that sort of thing, Miss Harman. If she wouldn't cry, of course I wouldn't mind so much."

The English of all this was, that the big brave man was afraid he should cry himself. However, there was no help for it, and the ordeal had to be gone through.

He started that night for Scottowe Rectory. They were on the look-out for him; but as the trains did not fit in as conveniently as they might, he did not reach his destination till late next day, having some distance to go by road.

There was no mistake about the warmth of his welcome both by Georgie and Tinkler. They did not do more than introduce him to Kate that evening; post-

poning by agreement any reference to her husband for a few days. And it was well — for she burst into tears at the sight of the friend who had seen the last of Hugh; and had to be taken charge of by Georgie, on the instant, for fear of further developments.

"You'll let me see the baby by-and-by, won't you, Mrs Scottowe?" he asked. "I'll have to go and make his acquaintance, you know. I'll expect to be let into the nursery when he's awake. Mrs Tinkler, you'll have to get leave to admit me to the nursery, won't you?" and he put out his hand to hold her till he got the promise.

"Oh yes," said Georgie, "I'll see to that;" and she felt as if she could kiss Bateman for his tact and kindness, in just saying the very best thing he could say on the spur of the moment. "You'll let him, Kate, won't you?"

Kate found her voice, and said "Yes" too; so they went to hunt up Bridget to prepare Master Hugh for inspection as soon as ever he sat up in his cradle.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

"*Elissa.* I am one in whose free faith the truth
And what is good is sacred.
Festus. I am too.
Elissa. I cannot bid thee hence."
—Bailey's *Festus.*

It was a sad blow to the proud Major-General to find that, notwithstanding all his efforts, and the efforts of the Bishop and his clergy—with whom he had allied himself in the face of the common danger—Hinch should have triumphed so completely, all along the line. The race meetings were now an established fact; and twice a-year the old man had to encounter defeat, conscious of the fact that, for three consecutive days, the devil was

periodically let loose in Westerly. There was nothing to be done, except by the special interposition of Providence; and to bring about this interposition by means of supplication, was seemingly to be the constant occupation of his few remaining years. Prayers for the conversion of Hinch were being continuously sent up to the Throne of Grace — both privately and at the Plymouth Brother meetings; if still without response yet not without hope.

Tyson, the stiff old servant who acted as the Major-General's valet — a retired pensioner who had served under him — was alarmed by the change observable in his master, and did not see the necessity for taking the Hinch business at all so seriously, and so much to heart. It didn't seem to him to matter greatly what became of Hinch ultimately—he might go to the devil for all he cared, "and a good job too"; but this latitudinarian aspect presented itself to his

own mind only: he did not venture to give expression to it; but if he had any power, he would have made short work of the meeting-house and everybody in it, as well as of Hinch, were only his master—whom he loved and respected—safely out of danger. But he smothered and concealed his murderous and unhallowed views—so much so and so well that the Major-General believed him to be eminently religious. He was certainly, as a body-servant, a treasure; though it was awkward to find that his memory had no room for anything in the past, but gruesome and valorous deeds of blood, in which his master had played always a conspicuous part, but of which he did not care to be reminded, in his then state of mind and on the threshold of eternity.

The Major-General, on the present occasion, had only just recovered from the shock of one of these conversational revivals, when

a knock was heard at the hall-door. Tyson hastened to answer it, and was agreeably surprised to find a strange face instead of one of the usual and familiar ones. There was an indefinable air of authority, too, about the handsome middle-aged visitor (which the genuine soldier always respects) as he inquired whether General Bynge-Hudson was in. Tyson saluted as he answered, and took the stranger's card. Now he hadn't saluted any one else calling at that house for years. His doing so, therefore, implied a very great compliment, which, however, was utterly lost on the object of it, who stepped briskly in and made way for the shutting of the door. Tyson hurried off and presented the card, standing stiffly "to attention."

"Verney — Verney — I don't know him. Who is he? What's his business?"

"Don't know, sir; he didn't say, but—he's a gentleman."

Tyson did not mean this as an indication

of the sex of the visitor—which, of course, the name on the card disclosed; but he wanted to convey that he was not one of his master's usual visitors; and he pulled himself up just in time to avoid the necessity of having to explain away his explanation.

"Show him in."

Tyson did so.

"You will, I hope, sir, excuse what may well be considered an intrusion," said Verney.

The old soldier got up and bowed in response. "If I can be of service in any way do not apologise," he said; "I am used to being interrupted, and if a man has business there is no intrusion." His searching solemn look appeared to disconcert the other for a moment; it seemed to ask, "Are you come to beg?" or, "Are you one of the numerous impostors, with a prepossessing exterior and insinuating manners, who, with these two qualities for their only stock-in-trade, prey upon society and worm them-

selves into the good graces of the credulous, the charitable, and the unwary?"

"If a man has business with me, sir," he repeated, "I have no objection to being disturbed."

"I do not seek any favour," said Verney, in response to the questioning look, coldly, but politely.

"If to confer one, there is still less need of apology."

"Nor to confer one—at least—that is——" He was apparently embarrassed, and broke down in spite of an evident effort not to do so. It was strange.

"Pray be seated," said the Major-General, changing suddenly in his tone and manner, as he offered a chair. Verney did not sit; but, putting his hand on the back of it, recovered himself, and went on.

"I come, sir, from the colonies—a long journey—and shall probably soon return. Before leaving this old country for ever, it

just occurred to me—seeing your name in a local paper—that, knowing something of a person believed to be many years dead—a person in whom you may be supposed to feel a natural interest—of your name—of your own flesh and blood—I ought to come and tell you all I know."

There was a strange far-away look in the speaker's eyes; and the words were uttered nervously, and brought a startled feeling to the old man, as of a sudden awakening from a prolonged sleep.

"My—my boy!" he gasped; "my son—my son!" and he sank into a chair—too weak to stand.

"Yes, sir—your disreputable son!"

"Don't say that, sir! Do not dare to say it! The past is between himself and me—and his God. What right have you——?"

"Every right," said Verney, interrupting; "I know him only too well—better than

you ever knew him, and I deliberately say, 'your disreputable son.'"

"Perhaps you are justified. Excuse me." The old man struggled pitifully to recover himself.

There was a pause. The white head drooped, and big tears fell. In his agony he continued, in hushed accents, "Spare me! spare me! I would have had it otherwise. If he has wronged you, sir, I may be able to requite you; but be as pitiful as you can. I am old, sir, and I have suffered; but the Lord will give me strength, as He has done in the past. Tell me all. Let me know the worst."

"Take courage, sir; you know the worst already—knew it long ago. I would give you pleasure, and not pain. He is in every sense a changed man."

"Has he found comfort — Grace?" said he, with a sudden outburst of hope and energy — "has he secured his own salva-

tion?" The fire of the enthusiast was in his voice and eye, as he looked eagerly for an answer.

"I do not say that, sir. I cannot give you any certainty as to that; but I know that his affection for you has outlived his past. I came to tell you this, and to give you his assurance, at his own suggestion."

"Dross! dross! dust in the balance! What am I that he should regard me? But his immortal soul!—his future? Give me assurance—give me certainty;" and he held out his hands imploringly, in pathetic supplication.

"I will tell you all I know," said Verney, "and you shall then form your own conclusions;" and now, as he spoke, he drew the chair close to the old man and sat down by him. "After years of struggle, of privation, and of hardship, he succeeded in life. He is even now a rich and prosperous man. Early in his career, after leaving this

country, he resolved, if he ever made his way in the world, to devote a large portion of his income to charitable uses. The rescue of orphan children from poverty and crime commended itself most warmly to his feelings; and with the co-operation of a good clergyman in his neighbourhood, who entered heartily into his plans, he founded and endowed an institution which he called the Bynge-Hudson Home. Strange as it may appear, he so named it—as I know—out of respect and regard for you. The same feeling induced him to suppress the fact that he was your son. He changed his surname, in order to hide the disgrace which he had brought upon it. His first charge, — for he commenced the work of rescue before he had the means to build,— a boy picked up in the street, was educated for the Church, sent over to England, ordained, and is now—rector of Scottowe."

"Joseph Tinkler! Thank God for this

good work, and for the change wrought by His Holy Spirit in my erring son. So long ago! He has atoned for much. But his regard for me—well, well—that is nothing —let it pass."

"You do not believe, then, in his sincerity?"

"I did not say so, sir, God forbid! but—of his regard for me—of that we need not speak."

"Why not?"

"Because, sir, since you press me, you are not perhaps aware that he made no sign through all those weary years. I believed him dead and—lost; and I mourned for him in bitterness of spirit. He might have spared me much suffering and agony of soul."

"Truly he might; but as a simple matter of fact, an equally false report as to your death reached him many years back; and only quite recently did he discover that you

were alive and well. He hesitated, even then, to communicate with you, as he learned that you had become—a—a religious enthusiast" (he was about to say a Plymouth Brother, but checked himself) —"which he is not; and he was not certain that you would care to receive back an unregenerate son. This is a question which I came here to ask — in his behalf."

"Yes; with all my heart!" said the Major-General, starting to his feet, and throwing up his hands in a high state of nervous excitement; "with open arms! What am I? a poor sinner, saved, not by my own merit but through Christ. What am I that I should judge him? There is yet time for his eternal salvation. While there is life there is hope. I will write to him at once, I will bring him back. Tell me, sir, where I may find him, what name he goes by. Where is he?"

"He is known as Adrian Verney, and—he is here!" The speaker started suddenly to his feet.

"My son! my son!" and the white head rested on the younger man's breast.

Both were utterly unnerved, and momentarily overcome. They were reconciled but not of one mind. How would they get on together?

Here was an ardent loving soul professing Christian humility with all the arrogance, the imperiousness of a spiritual autocrat—a veritable Gospel tyrant, believing in the eternal punishment of all who did not accept the dicta of his sect.

He was deaf to the attacks of reason, blind to the logic of facts. Not with the carnal sword of the flesh did he fight now in his old age, but with the flaming sword of the Spirit; waging war against that intellectual sufficiency which was the besetting sin of the age—the arrogance of brains,

and waging it with an arrogance immeasurably greater.

He was face to face now with the terrible difficulty of his life. His heart went out towards this erring son, who was lost and now was found, after so many weary and regretful years. But how if, in spite of this, the man should be lost to all eternity? The dreadful thought overwhelmed the old soldier, but the fighting instinct gradually asserted itself. He would combat the evil one. Adrian should stay, and should yet bear living witness to the truth, become a believer, and like himself find certainty and rest. He must be kept at home at all hazards.

Their conversation, as may easily be surmised, was long and earnest. One man was full of the eager enthusiasm of the saint, whose eloquence and fervour gained additional force from the peculiar circumstances of the situation—his great age, his

piety, his courage, the respect and regard which he commanded as a father; the other filled with a son's affection and a son's remorse — equally courageous and equally honest.

"Give me the comforting assurance, Adrian, that you are not lost, my son— that you are not an infidel, an altruist, an agnostic. Great God! not these."

"I am not an infidel, sir," said Adrian, letting the other designations pass; "but I would not deceive you."

"No, no. Be open and candid, now."

"I remember, years ago" — he spoke calmly, slowly, and deliberately—"how I used to watch the muster of the regiment at early morning in the barrack-square. That the bugle-call aroused the men, I knew; 'but,' I used to ask myself, 'who always wakes the bugler?' This was but the precursor of that momentous question to which we all seek an answer in after-

life — the unexplained mystery that lies behind all creeds. You name it God."

"Surely, surely."

"I would not cavil at the name. But I belong to no sect—no creed."

"Nor I, my son — no sect, no creed. The Bible, and the Bible only, is my rule of faith — and quite sufficient for us all."

"Ah, sir, unfortunately to me the Bible is the great initial difficulty. I see so many religions based upon it, that to choose one would be a difficult matter to a perfectly unprejudiced mind; and we are creatures of prejudice or of precedent. Again, I believe in a Great First Cause—a superhuman mind—a God, if you will; and the Scriptural attributes of divinity are repulsive to me—I could not accept them."

"You deny the Inspiration of God's Holy Word, the Incarnation, the Atonement!" he said, fairly aghast with horror. "My

unhappy son, may God in His infinite mercy convert you!" He clasped his hands, and lifted them to heaven as if in supplication.

"I had hoped, my father, that it might not have been necessary to emphasise our differences," said Adrian, sorrowfully; "but since we have drifted into controversy, I do not wish to sail under false colours, or to deceive you in any way. Therefore, dreadful, shocking, and painful as it must appear to you to hear me say so, I am obliged in all honesty to confess that I do not accept these tenets which you hold as of vital importance. That there is a something above and around us which we do not understand—a power which we cannot control—is all that is certain; but I repudiate revelation; and rather than give you pain by the presence of a son holding views so diametrically opposite to your own, I will—having made my peace with

you as complete as I can — return to the colonies."

"No! no! no! You shall not go till you have made your peace with God, Adrian. Promise me you will not go! Not yet, oh! not yet, Adrian—my son!"

"I will wait, then, for your permission, sir."

"I will pray for your conversion. We will all pray for you—at our next meeting I will tell all to God, and we will not cease till we are heard, and you have been plucked as a brand from the burning."

Supremely pathetic all this faith and fervour seemed to Adrian, so much so as to utterly dwarf the other aspect which it presented. It moved him to the depths of his soul. But above it all stood out, in bold relief, the sublime affection which had survived so much that should have killed it; which had forgotten and forgiven, and now asserted itself with all the freshness of the days long gone. If the prayers of

the fond old soldier, backed up by all the Plymouth Brethren in the place, must be, as Adrian knew they would be, ineffectual, what matter after all? There survived the great and loving soul. There need be no harsh disagreement or heated argument—indeed he felt that all argument would be simply thrown away. There was clearly no common ground between them on the question of creeds. Adrian was a firm believer in humanity, in the future of the race; and every quality which in the individual he could admire now gave strength to his belief. Over and above the emotion which obscured the mental vision of the father, the son could clearly discern some of those noble qualities on which he based his own unformulated belief as to the capabilities and the destiny of man. He resolved to avoid controversy, and not to touch on these burning questions of his own free will; but he little knew the task

that was before him, and had no idea as yet of the pertinacity with which he would be attacked — so terribly real were the dangers, and momentous the issues which, in the estimation of the old man, depended on the struggle. The devil should not take from him his only son. If he himself had made his calling and election sure, his son should not be cut adrift or left derelict, while a chance remained to rescue him from the pains of everlasting fire.

They spent a long day together, and, as may be easily surmised under the circumstances, the time passed quickly; but again and again did the father return to the one point which seemed to him the only really important one—in fact he could not let it out of sight. Adrian was too honest to hide anything when the question at issue came to a head, and required a straightforward "Yes" or "No," hence many an unavoidably painful discovery on the part

of his father as to his son's spiritual state. There was no arguing with him; he repudiated reason and controversy, and met every difficulty with the piteous appeal—"Believe, believe!"

Things got at last to such a hopeless theological entanglement that it began to dawn upon the poor father that if his duty was clear, his task was proportionately difficult; but with the feeling which prompts men of his profession to volunteer for a forlorn-hope, he nerved himself for the final issue. He would win or die; for supineness when the salvation of a human soul, and that soul his son's, depended on his energy, was not to be thought of. He set himself to know the very worst—painful as the knowledge was—because he did not feel his foothold sure till he had obtained this knowledge.

"We are indeed fallen on evil times, Adrian," he said, after a short diversion of subject, which his son in vain endeavoured

to prolong, "when men holding preferment in the Church are not ashamed or afraid to openly accept the theories of Darwin or of Huxley, or to put God aside altogether as the Creator of the universe and of man. It is a comfort to me that you at least acknowledge His supremacy."

"I do more than that, sir, for I say unhesitatingly that the facts stated by scientists —presuming them to be facts—display the master-mind, the supreme intelligence, in a far more majestic and worshipful light than does the childish story of the Creation as narrated in the Bible." The old man visibly shrank, as if stung, but did not speak. "There seems to be a rooted antipathy to acknowledge the ape as an ancestor of ours; and yet——" The old man shuddered again, and mutely put the possibility from him with repellent palms.

"I do assure you, sir," continued Adrian, "that I can project my vision, without effort,

into the distant future, quite far enough to discern so great an advance in the human race as to warrant the assumption that, even as we now repudiate the ape as our progenitor, so will the future and more perfect man repudiate us as having rightly occupied a place on the family-tree of the ages."

"The signs of the times are clear, my son: time will not wait. The finger of prophecy points to an end—to a speedy termination of all earthly systems. The days of this world are numbered, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand—the advent of the Saviour. Choose, choose, Adrian! Do not hesitate. Do not accept dross for sterling metal. Darwin is not God!"

"I never said so, sir. I have endeavoured to convince you that I do not worship any false god; nor do I, as a matter of fact, accept Darwin as an exponent of my creed. To me there are insurmountable difficulties,

which have not been met or bridged over by any of these men. We shall have time, I hope, later on, to discuss points of difference and of interest, since it is your wish that I should remain at home. To-day I am compelled to be brief, because I am limited to time, and I have not, as yet, told you all I came here to tell you, and must tell you."

So it was at last arranged, by mutual agreement, that controversy should cease while Adrian explained his position.

He had to relate a good deal that is already known to the reader, and had to do it very cautiously. He saw all the difficulties he had to face, and he resolved to be perfectly open and frank, to keep back nothing, and then, when a clean breast had been made, to put again the question to his father as to remaining or returning. There should be no deception. It was a painful ordeal, but it must be faced calmly and resolutely.

We are only interested now in the result,

which was more satisfactory than even Adrian expected. The father believed that by the providence of God this erring soul had been sent to him to save. He would never again lose sight of his son. Reluctantly, therefore, did he entertain the idea of letting him go even for a day. But Adrian was obliged of necessity to pay a visit to Scottowe Rectory. He must see Kate and Tinkler, to arrange certain business matters with them; but he promised that no time should be lost.

For years the old man had not felt so young at heart as he felt now; and when he parted with Adrian, he did so only on the solemn assurance that there would be no delay about his return beyond what was unavoidable; and only let him go barely in time to catch the train for Bexley Junction, while he hurried off himself to the evening meeting of the faithful and the saved.

There was to him a sensation about this business as of "going into action" in the days of long ago; but the vital energy was not there, and he was physically unequal to the emotional strain which attendance at this meeting now specially involved. The Major-General belonged to that section of the Brethren which is composed of units all knit together by a bond of certitude as to their salvation; and part of whose occupation it is to listen to tales of backsliding and sin on the part of relatives and friends; and to wrestle with and importune Heaven for a special interposition in each case.

Heartfelt and deep were the prayers offered up that evening in Adrian's behalf; and the dear old man returned from the exhausting spiritual exercise flushed and hopeful that God would hear and save.

CHAPTER VII.

HARD HIT.

"Sadnes and griefe
Bringe no reliefe.
Bid them adiew."
—*Bacchus' Bounty*, 1593.

"Being called on the other day, by one in love, I gave my advice —that you are not to choose your physician for his knowledge in your distemper, but for having it himself."—*Tatler.*

"What is it to be wise?
'Tis but to know how little can be known."
—POPE.

IN a day or two Bateman was quite at home at the rectory, and he felt that he might venture to fulfil his mission to Kate. Nothing could be kinder or more sympathetic than the way in which our lieutenant talked to her about the great loss she had sustained. You would not have expected to find so much tact and good feeling, knowing him only superficially and in his gayest moods;

nor would you have credited him with the tenderness of a child. But, if you think about it, you will find that, among your own acquaintances, there is almost invariably this quality underlying the light-hearted nature. The more sun the greater shadow; and but for light we should have no shade. It is only your equable man — your confoundedly "well-balanced" character — who is cold; and the nature of Fitz was Irish —neither equable nor chilly, but warm.

He told Kate of how bravely her husband had lost his life in generously and nobly endeavouring to save the major; how his prowess was the talk and admiration of the regiment; and how the last sacred promise made to the dying man was to befriend the girl he left behind him—the wife and mother.

"I swore it," said Fitz; "and if I could die for you or him, and if I could benefit the living by it, I would gladly; but — there would be no use in that."

Neither would there. Day after day, while he lingered at the hospitable rectory, there was something new to tell her, while she listened with rapt attention, and wept healing and most soothing tears: there is a luxury in grief, as we all know.

Hugh ought to have had the Victoria Cross, and would have had it, if he had lived. Ah! the pity of it all! He did not tell her—the modest fellow—how he had been sounded about that decoration for himself by the colonel; how he had distinctly told old Blister that nothing on earth would induce him to accept such an invidious distinction; and how he would be ashamed to wear it among his brother officers—looking upon it as a most unwise decoration, and one that should never be conferred on or worn by any thorough soldier who loved his gallant comrades and the service. But this was a fact. He had very strong feelings about the royal gift "for valour" where all

were equally brave, but not equally fortunate, or equally pushing. These sentiments, to my mind, did him infinite credit, and I am sure he was right; but—which did him additional honour—he dwelt untiringly upon Hugh's right to the Cross, all the same; knowing that to Kate too much could not be said about the soldier who was past all honour, save posthumous and genuine tributes to bravery from a man as brave as he.

The natural consequence followed all this sort of thing. It could not go on without the usual result. Eros is never cruel. If he wounds, give him but fair chances and he cures as certainly, with the aid of time and opportunity.

Fitz should have been at home in the wilds of Kerry, "picking up," on his sick leave; but he elected to remain at Scottowe Rectory—being made so cordially welcome by Tinkler and Georgie. It was his fate.

He grew passionately, madly in love with Kate. He could not help it. The idea of protection first insinuated itself, and gradually developed into a sacred sense of duty, when he found how unprotected she was—that is, he deluded himself, as lovers will, into the belief that she was unprotected; though there was not any doubt but that her brother and Georgie would be glad to have her always. By easy but rapid stages the unselfish element was overmastered by the personal. The question was, How could he best serve her? Clearly by possession—there was no other satisfactory solution of the complex problem. He did not argue it all out with himself, but we may legitimately do so for him.

Kate's tenderness and weakness touched him, as these qualities always touch a strong man. Her beauty was bewitching; and we know what havoc this works in the world around us every day, whether the male be

weak or strong. How could he escape, even if he tried to? — which, as we see, he didn't.

I think that Georgie guessed something, and helped him on. I always, as you know, liked Georgie, in spite of her defects; and, I confess, I don't like her the less on this account. I am sure, too, that Bridget, the little Irish nurse who looked after baby, was a powerful ally—though unattached; for she never lost an opportunity of praising the lieutenant, with ready wit and native tact —sparingly at first, and then more unreservedly, as she saw that circumstances warranted the venture, and that developments were dimly visible. When, one day, he actually took Hugh in his arms, "for all the world," she said, "as if he was his own flesh and blood," she felt that there was no need for further reserve, but went in for unstinted and unmeasured admiration forthwith.

"And Master Hugh cried so, ma'am, when I took him back, that it quite went to my heart," said Bridget, "and made me jealous —so it did."

Whereat Kate kissed him for his father— and the tears came into her eyes again.

There could be, I repeat, but one result. Fitz fell over head and ears in love. He had now to win the prize; but everything was in his favour. She had come to feel a sympathetic companionship in his presence. Her sense of loneliness vanished in his company; and a full sense of protection seemed to envelop her when he was nigh. She began to look wistfully for him every morning, and missed him when the day was done. Telling him of her early love, soon came to be quite natural and relieving to her — he was so altogether patient and nice.

Now, "nice" is notoriously the only adjective of the feminine gender: it is a woman's

word; and when she applies it to a man, that man—if he only gets to know it—may hope against the longest odds. No handicapping can affect him; whatever is "on the cards," he wins. But Fitz did not know as soon as he might. He was hopefully uncertain, but determined. Without her he felt that he must be—as we all are sure to be under similar circumstances—for ever miserable. As a matter of fact he was "smitten" on the first day; now he was so hard hit that there was no cure but one.

The favourable moment came at last, and he seized upon it with an ardour which is the heritage and birthright of all love-making sons of the Emerald Isle. I am, in all truth, bound to acknowledge that he did not say anything striking or original at this momentous crisis, or which has not been said many times before, and will be repeated for many times to come; but he said it

in a way peculiar to himself, and which had the desired effect. There was no resisting, though the effort was tried in a self-make-believe way by Kate; but the plain English of it was that she, too, loved before she was really aware of it. She called the feeling by various self-deceptive names which led up to gratitude, and culminated in affection; and when the chord was struck, the response was plain: the heart could not be deceived or trifled with; and so it fell out that Fitz came to have her in his arms one day, with her head resting on his breast.

To him she was worth her weight in gold; and she was the happy possessor of all his true manly devotion and regard.

The baby in his crib saw it all, and began to resent the unusual inattention to himself; so he had to be taken up and talked to. There never was a better baby, I will say that. He might have opposed and frustrated the whole business by inopportune

captiousness; and it is greatly to his credit that he didn't. He was content now to sit upon his mother's lap, and enter into the spirit of the scene, while she and Fitz talked happily together.

We need only report portions of the conversation. She developed a playful self-depreciation which was natural and charming, and which he had to combat for a while; but it was tentative rather than strong.

"I am so stupid," she said, apologetically, "and—and—you are so clever."

"Ah," he replied, "clever! That is the very first time I have been paid such a compliment. My best friends, heretofore, have never suspected me of cleverness."

"Well, at all events, I am so very ignorant."

"You are quite learned enough for me; I hate learned women," he said honestly, but with dubious compliment.

With captivating simplicity she declared that she didn't "really mind being ignorant —one bit." What did it matter after all, "so long as I can get information when I want it?"

He laughed at the quaintness of the speech, which undoubtedly had a great deal of common-sense in it. If we can get to know what we want to know, where is the practical need for anything beyond. Knowledge is power—you say; but then there are numberless good souls who thrive and are happy without power—loving and tender souls, to whom the man of their choice is the embodiment of it. This big lieutenant, with the Irish heart, was just the man, in such a vicarious emergency, to play a winning game. Handsome, brave, earnest, and good; he was not to be gainsaid whether she was learned or not.

Now this question of ignorance is a difficult one, and at best only one of degree,

and purely relative. Thomas, in his 'Life of Descartes,' says that it is "a topic of no consideration." There is an education for the herd of mankind, but "the man of genius admits that only which he gives to himself: it consists almost always in destroying the first." From this we may reasonably infer that even a great philosopher—leaving Kate out of the question altogether—will voluntarily reduce himself to an intellectually negative condition, on a par with an ignoramus of the ordinary everyday sort, in order to rise ultimately to a pinnacle of fame. There is therefore hope for Kate, which is further strengthened by the fact that a person capable of listening is on the road to wisdom. Fitz found her, in this respect, most satisfactory.

I think myself that both wisdom and education can be always dispensed with by a clever naturalness on the part of a woman who refrains from discussing what

she does not understand, and merely says, "I differ from you."

You need not dread the highwayman when you have nothing in your pockets but your hands. So, when you are unencumbered with any intellectual pretensions, you can confound the most learned of professors by boldly disagreeing with him and — stopping there. This quality, or capability, I take to be what Swift means by the "discretion of dulness," and which very likely he occasionally found too much for him.

But there is yet another aspect of the case. Huxley, for instance, would — for Kate's edification — describe a primrose as a dicotyledonous exogen with a monopetalous corolla and central placentation. Now, imagine that! Probably she, in common with, I hope, most of my lady readers, would be quite content not to know the names of flowers at all, pro-

vided that she could only grow them, pluck them, possess them, smell them, and otherwise enjoy them at her own sweet will. Life is short; these names are long and terribly difficult to remember and to spell; and the flowers fade while we stop to classify and arrange.

Fitz was fully equal to gathering them for her, taking off the thorns and all the rest of it—which was what she needed to make her happy. As for a blue-stocking—he hated women of that class as much as I do.

All this simply means, when boiled down: —appeal to the eye rather than to the mind if you want satisfactory and speedy results: most people can see, but few are clever—which is a great comfort to the majority. But a man of talent is no taller than you or I, my good sir, except in his own estimation. Knowledge, it is true, even without talent, places you on stilts, and gives you glimpses through the windows of the

clever people who live higher up. But, if you are not ambitious, Kate's views will be found to suit your case admirably, and to wear well—no matter to which sex you may belong. "In any event," says Pliny to his wife's aunt, "love is the best of instructors;" and it is only necessary that men should endeavour to be what women, during the early stages of this educational process, fancy they are—perfection.

Fitz now disclaimed any pretensions whatever to erudition: he would have none of it. "Don't make any mistake," he said to Kate; "I mustn't sail under false colours, because I'm not a walking cyclopædia, and there are a great many things that might stump me at an exam. But my love for you is genuine—that's all I care about—deep down—ever so deep. It has entered into my very being. I could not root it out if I were to try—ever so hard. But do you know that you haven't really *said* 'Yes'? I know it is

all right, of course; but I want to hear you say it. If you were to throw me over," he continued, with the usual prolixity of a young man in his mentally and morally enfeebled condition, "I should not care what happened; I'd exchange and go abroad and eat my heart out—that's all." A mode of appeasing the voracity of despair which does not appear to be as uncommon in theory as in reality.

Here an eloquent silence supervened.

He drew closer to her and put his arm round her where she sat. The baby somehow managed to get hold of his first finger and tightened his little fist upon it: the situation, therefore, was comic as well as pathetic.

"Look!" he said, "by Jove! the chap won't let me go. It is well that you haven't the heart to send me away, and he didn't hear you distinctly say that 'Yes.'"

Her head drooped. Was it to look at

Hugh? She smoothed back the floss upon his forehead without speaking. Fitz tried, with the other hand under her softly rounded chin, whether she would yield to the sideway pressure. She did, and looked into his face with swimming eyes. He pressed his lips to hers—their first kiss; and the words "my sweet" were plainly audible. For some moments he remained in happy unconsciousness of the fact that baby had transferred the captive finger to his innocent gums, and was having a high old time of it on his own account. What mattered it? Hugh might have devoured the finger altogether, or at least reduced it to pulp, for all the owner felt or cared.

"Remember, Kate, I am to be Fitz now, and not Mr Bateman any more."

Here Hugh, having discarded the finger, began to kick and crow in happy ecstasy, and divided the attention of the mother.

"Put the little chap," he pleaded, "into

his cradle. I think he wants to go to sleep."

She knew he didn't, but nevertheless she obeyed. The object of their mutual solicitude good-naturedly determined to enter fully into the spirit of the scene, and crowed again more vigorously than before, as he lay on his back and saw his mother crushed once more into the warm embrace of the stalwart soldier. He was clearly quite contented with his future father-in-law, as evinced by sundry signs—such as turning up his two big toes and turning down all his lesser ones at one and the same time—which I take to be as significant of content in a baby, as the motion of a cat's paws when he lies prone and purring on the hearth.

"Fitz—dear Fitz," said Kate, plaintively, "do you know that I have nothing—absolutely nothing—in the wide, wide world but—him?"

Now, if she appraised the baby, Fitz felt that he had a right to be also included in the stocktaking.

"You have me," he said, circling her small head with his two hands and kissing her again. "I am somebody—or something."

"You are—all—everything." (This was inconsistent with the previous statement, but what did that matter? Neither noticed it.) "And I trust you and believe in you, now and for ever."

"You may," responded Fitz; "there never was a true man if I am not. People talk a lot of nonsense about love at first sight, and the impossibility of it. I didn't believe in it myself at one time, and I didn't think it was really that in my own case; but it was: I know now. By Jove! how everything is changed! I don't mind telling you" (he spoke with bated breath for fear of being overheard and misjudged by the third party in the cradle) "that I used positively to

detest babies; but now I shouldn't mind in the least stopping all day to—rock the cradle: that is, if you were here too, because of course, if he began to cry, I shouldn't know how to manage. I'm as fond of the little chap," he said, as he followed her over to Hugh, "as if he was my own."

This fitted in with the statements of Bridget. "Ah!" said Kate with playful jealousy, "perhaps, after all, it's the boy and not me."

"No, it isn't—it's you,—at least—well—it's both of you. You must not be suspicious."

"Well, I won't! I'll try and not be."

Then he fell into a momentary sort of brown study, contemplating his possible happiness as he looked into her captivating face, till she rallied him with an offer of a penny for his thoughts.

"They were selfish," he replied.

"Well?"

"I was just thinking how nice it is to

have a baby ready, because I often used to fancy how horrid it must be when people go on their wedding-trip, to be stared at and talked about and watched by everybody."

"But he won't prevent that."

"Yes, he will. Because we'll take him with us, don't you know, and—they'll think we have been married for ever so long!"

Kate laughed a real good healthy laugh —the first for a long time—at the funny idea, and at the bashfulness which entertained the idea, and found comfort in it; but saw difficulties which didn't occur to him.

"You silly old man! The nurse would be sure to tell, and then——"

"Bridget! no, she won't, because we'll get another one, whom we won't let into the secret." And he looked quite serious, and quite pleased at the thought of his deeply laid scheme for defeating the legitimate curiosity of the public.

"Oh, but I never could part with Bridget!" pleaded Kate; "she is so fond of baby and of me."

"We could take her back again, you know," explained the wily soldier.

"But then I might like the new maid, and find it hard to send her away when the time came."

He was ready for even this emergency. "We could keep her on as a parlour-maid —if it came to that."

"Yes—we might," assented Kate.

Then he broached the subject of when the event was to be. This was now the main point to be settled, and he pressed her very hard.

"Oh, not for ever, ever so long! You'll wait, won't you, for my sake, a little? I couldn't — we must wait. Poor Hugh!" She put both hands suddenly to her face, and then the tears came again, forcing their way between the delicate fingers.

"Yes, yes, of course — sweet. I won't urge any more. I'll wait. The brave fellow loved you, as I know, dearly and devotedly, but not more truly than I. The best tribute I can pay to his worth and to his appreciation of you is to love you and the boy— and to wait for his sake."

For his sake! This is the way men talk, you see, my dear madam, when they become infatuated. But we must not be too hard. It is enough for us to know that the living lover was a sound and true man; and that, even if he did talk nonsense under embarrassing circumstances, he worshipped the ground Kate stood on; and if needs were, would die for her at a moment's notice. When he got her round again, he repeated the assurance that he would wait.

"You are right, when I come to think of it. It would look bad to be too precipitate: we'll postpone it, my darling, long enough— just long enough to satisfy Mrs Grundy."

"Who is Mrs Grundy?" asked the innocent Kate, looking up inquiringly.

"Oh! don't you know? Really! Well, she is only an imaginary personage, I'm glad to say, who represents all the proprieties."

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "You see now how ignorant I am. I told you I was; but you never supposed that you would so soon have proof of it. Did you?"

He answered her in a way which seemed conclusive and satisfactory to both; and then went on to explain that though Mrs Grundy was an ideal female, she had representatives in the flesh at most places; and that, as far as his judgment went, Mrs Fungus occupied the proud position in Westerly.

They sat and chatted till the first gong sounded for dinner, and how the time flew, to be sure! Poor Kate! charming Kate! I am glad that things have turned out so well for her. You think, my dear madam,

that she is fickle, and does not deserve it all. Too easily won, and that! You feel that you would not have yielded so soon. But you should make allowances for very exceptional circumstances. Have you ever, may I ask, been laid siege to by an open-hearted and a tender-hearted, eloquent, handsome, and gallant Munster-man? Pronounce the last adjective with the accent on either syllable—for either pronunciation will apply in this instance. Not fervent love alone did he bring to bear, but that which is akin to it—love's poor relation, pity; and when you meet, under these circumstances, a man who won't take "No" for an answer, you may be sure that he will upset some of your conclusions. A personal opportunity of testing this assertion is, madam, all the harm I wish you.

Bateman's stay at the rectory was to have been for a few days only—he was in such a hurry home. The time ran into over

three weeks before he had settled the momentous matters of which we have just been giving particulars. At last he made up his mind that the best way to face and get over the months which must intervene between the present time and the absolute and undisputed proprietorship of Kate would be to do his duty — run over to Ireland and "make a clean breast of it."

We will not follow him; but we may, however, convey the assurance that Kate will be warmly welcomed when she crosses the Channel as Mrs Bateman.

Now, if any one had told the lieutenant, twelve months ago, that sane and rational beings existed who wrote every day to one another for an uncertain period, he would have hesitated to believe it. Nay, more, he would have ruthlessly laughed at any fellow in his regiment who pleaded guilty to the charge. Yet, to have chaffed him now about all this sentimental business, would

have been to court on the part of the chaffer extremely unpleasant relations with the chaffee.

If you are a hard-headed, matter-of-fact person, without either sentiment or romance, you will set him down as a goose. What matters it? Kate's opinion now is the one he values; and to her *fit nova Cycnus avis* —Cycnus is quite another and a finer bird. For myself, I can only say that all my geese are swans, and always have been, as long as I can remember. I side with Kate, in this particular instance, without a moment's hesitation.

"All this love-making is very superficial," says the egregious sage; and "we judge too much by appearances." What else have nine out of ten of us to judge the tenth by? We can't be content without judging; and, if we waited for esoteric light, we might never get it. On the whole, the superficial does us very well all round; and we are

content that the majority should judge ourselves by the same standard. A superficial verdict on its units, is all that a busy and over-rapid community has time enough to indulge in; and it is just as well that the fact is so. Don't let us be too searching and scrutinous. There are wheels within wheels; and though some of the smaller cogs be broken, what matter while the social machine works smoothly? We can't all be engineers; but when there is a break-down, the social expert is never far to seek, nor his condemnation long withheld — as some of us know to our cost.

You doubt the soundness of this reasoning. Well, let us always strive to give each other the benefit of a doubt, and think well of people when we can: it is the cheapest form of philanthropy with which I am acquainted.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE ROAD AND OFF.

"No hap so hard but may in fine amend."—SOUTHWELL.

WINTER had come unusually early and suddenly on this particular year. There was a heavy fall of snow in November.

Mr Pipperly did not like travelling about in it, but it could not be avoided: he had to close this business of the purchase for Lavinia, or to expect no peace. Thank goodness, this was likely to be his final trip. Everything was settled, to all intents and purposes, at last; and he was now on his way to Scottowe to announce to Mrs West, the lady in charge, that the place had changed hands, and that it was Miss Har-

man's strongly expressed wish that she should remain there just as long as it suited her own convenience to stay, and on the same terms.

It is curious how one feels the cold in a first-class compartment of a railway-carriage, shut up with several other passengers, with foot-warmers, and any amount of wraps; but, as we all know, one does, in spite of every precaution. It puts one out of humour, and rapidly develops the national tendency to moroseness and unamiable isolation. Under the unfavourable circumstances we look upon a funny man, or a cheery and talkative one, as an unconscionable nuisance. Even the good-natured man who offers his newspapers and periodicals all round, does not meet with spontaneous gratitude; and the thanks which he receives are grudgingly given, and in a tone which seems to imply that you would rather not have had to accept his overtures, and only open the papers

because you don't wish to be thought devoid of good-breeding. You return everything speedily, and do so with an air which indicates that familiar intercourse is thenceforward at an end. You rearrange your rugs —which his officious civility has obliged you to loosen—and a moody silence follows.

If the journey is uneventful, you complete it without adding to your circle of acquaintance or enlarging your experience of humanity. It requires an unusual amount of jolting and bumping from imperfectly screwed-up couplings, a slow rate of speed, an irregularity in time-keeping, a break-down, a blow-up, a collision, a run off the rails—something to create a grievance, in order to get over the Britisher's reserve, and awaken conversational sociability. The traveller only thaws to grumble; and when he finds that his companions can also grumble, a bond of sympathetic union is at once established, on a firm basis.

Silence reigned supreme in the particular compartment with which we are interested, for such a lengthened period, that the journey seemed likely to terminate as it began, when suddenly there occurred a series of thumpings and jumpings of a most startling and physically disturbing character, and ending in the stoppage of the train.

Everybody was flustered, perturbed, or frightened, with the single exception of a gentleman sitting in the corner opposite Mr Pipperly—a man who had neither read nor slept since the start; and who now sat calm and undisturbed while those around him were in a state of commotion and nervousness. He was a handsome man, fresh-coloured and healthy-looking, with hair of iron-grey, a large beard, and a neatly trimmed moustache which did not hide a resolute mouth. He seemed to be mentally amused, and to be taking enjoyment out of others' discomfiture. It seemed to Pip-

perly something strange and uncanny; but there was no time just then for much speculation. A fussy old gentleman made a rush for the window, and in doing so trod on the mysterious man's toes, and begged pardon, as a matter of course. "Don't mention it, sir," was the response; "I should have had the sense to keep my feet out of the way."

Mr Pipperly could see that he winced, all the same. The other window was down now; people had found their tongues and voices, and the engine blowing off steam added to the din. The scene was soon an animated one. Night was setting in. The ground was covered with snow. There was a keen frost. The train had gone off the rails—fortunately without causing injury to life or limb; and the line was blocked, and the engine disabled by the bursting of a pipe. A pale crescent moon looked calmly down on the confusion; and the myriad stars sparkled brightly in the blue-green overhead, which gradually softened

into a pale-lemon tint near the horizon—on the line of which, in the middle distance, a row of gaunt sentinel firs stood out in black relief.

The public road at the spot where the accident occurred skirted and ran parallel to the railway, separated from it only by a hedge; till—about a quarter of a mile distant—it took a sharp turn up a steep incline, where the railway cutting was crossed by a stone bridge, which was still clearly outlined and defined in the waning light.

Everybody, save the mysterious stranger, jumped out, to find themselves more than ankle-deep in the snow. Knots of fussy, gabbling, female passengers stood about the carriages; equally gabbling and fussy men ran to and fro, collecting into groups, colliding with each other, and then dispersing again, only to poke their noses and heads into places where they were not wanted—obstructing guard, engine-driver, and stoker

in their efforts to get at the extent of damage to the machinery. Not a few old men stood patiently in one place, instead of gadding about, looking hopeless, but equally in the way; stamping their feet or clapping their hands to keep up circulation. It was a "mixed train"—so, therefore, was the crowd—high and low, rich and poor, old and young. There was the highly nervous gentleman discharging a volley of questions at everybody within earshot; and there was—as a set-off—the irascible old gent. vowing vengeance against the railway company, and threatening any number of actions at law. The inevitable demon boy was there too—present in every gathering, like the stray dog at a review—running headlong into mischief and danger, and seemingly determined to end by going straight into the fire-box. "'Arry" was present also. What crowd is perfect without him! In fact there were two—rival

but friendly ones — who seemed to be the only persons who had good spirits enough left to look upon the situation as comic. They "chaffed" the engine-driver to their hearts' content, and were hugely tickled when he looked stolid, and didn't seem to see the point. They soon found out, by his accent, that he was an Irishman, and then they called him "Pat," asked him if he kept whisky as well as water on board; whether the engine was "screwed,"—and so on. He was too busy to heed them for a time, till—going to the front to get at some part of the machinery—one 'Arry suggested to the other that "'e was a-goin' to sit on her 'ed, and the ladies had better take care she don't kick."

This tickled the Irishman, who saw the glimmer of joke in it, and enjoyed it. Both the cads hailed the sign of friendliness, and presumed upon it to get at the cause of the accident—being devoured by curiosity.

"Do I know? Why, of course I do," explained the engine-driver in a confidential tone. "She shied. You don't believe it! There was a waggon and six horses going over the bridge when we were running under it; and when she saw it she threw up her heels and—bolted. Now you know all about it, and mind you don't split."

While this sort of thing went on, the guard was on his way to Bexley Junction, three miles distant, from which it was expected that in about two hours relief would come; so there was nothing for it but to wait patiently till the time was up.

Chill soon got the better of Mr Pipperly, and he returned to the comparative comfort and warmth of the carriage. He found his fellow-traveller seated in the same corner, quietly indulging in a cigar.

"You don't object to this, I hope," he said.

"Oh dear, no—not at all," said Mr Pipperly, cheerily. "I like it, I assure you."

"Perhaps you smoke, then? May I offer you a cigar?"

"Well, I do—just a little. But thanks—no! I am a very moderate smoker indeed."

"On such an exceptional occasion as this, sir, even a slight excess might be permitted."

"No; not at my time of life. I have passed the period when any excess, however slight, is safe."

"You will excuse me," said the stranger. "I am no hand at compliments; but, judging by appearances, I should dispute the premisses—which imply age."

Mr Pipperly was pleased in spite of himself. "Well, at all events," he responded, "you have paid one, and such a flattering one, that I am disposed to give way, if you will allow me to retract my refusal."

He accepted the proffered gift, lighting it from the glowing end of his companion's "weed"—a genuine misnomer, by the by, in the present instance, for the tobacco was

of the finest brand. "This business is extremely annoying, sir," he went on, when he had got his cigar well under way—"extremely annoying. A cheerful prospect for the next two or three hours—isn't it?"

"Well, if not exactly cheerful, still the situation has its compensations. For instance, it is picturesque: there is some satisfaction to be got out of that. It is a new experience—there is an air of uncertainty as to its cause—an air of mystery as to its results—and so on." He laughed, a genial laugh, which showed that his cynicism did not go much deeper than the surface. "You'd probably prefer, sir, being at home, sitting comfortably in an easy-chair by your drawing-room fire."

Mr Pipperly moved his head in a way which was both a nod and a shake, and was easily interpreted to mean "Decidedly."

"Yet a reflective mind—as I hope yours is—should find some satisfaction in dwelling

on this theory of compensation, and drawing conclusions from it."

"You'll excuse me," said Mr Pipperly, having an idea that his companion was going in for chaff, and wishing to give the conversation a turn in an opposite direction; "but if I had been asked to pick out the one person among the crowd of fellow-passengers likely to draw philosophical consolation from the unpromising circumstances around us, I should have at once singled you out."

The listener laughed again his pleasant laugh. "And curiously enough," he retorted, "if I had been asked who among the crowd was least likely to form a groundless conclusion, I should unhesitatingly have pointed to you—with equal promptness and greater accuracy."

"You are more than a match for me at compliments, I admit," replied Mr Pipperly; "but I based my estimate on the extra-

ordinary coolness which you have displayed under what ordinary or average mortals would consider most exciting circumstances."

"Hardly a sufficient basis on which to found the reputation of a philosopher. I represent rather a phase of mental indolence, I should imagine, and nothing more. I did not see the necessity for adding to the fuss, and I did not add to it. The supply of nervousness exceeded the demand. I did not ask any questions, because others asked more than I saw any need for. I felt, moreover, that if any valuable information was obtained I should hear it; and I knew that if it was necessary to get out, we should be ordered out. I have enjoyed my cigar, and my feet are dry."

"Allow me to remark," broke in Mr Pipperly, taking the cigar out of his mouth and putting on a look of concentration to add force to his words, "that all this appears like anything but mental indolence. It is,

if you will permit me, mental shrewdness of —of—of the most pronounced type." Here he resumed his cigar. "Allied perhaps it may be to physical indolence."

"But, you see, that theory won't fit; because I have been all my life, and am still, a most active worker and labourer. I have never spared myself any bodily exertion as a means to an end; and by it I lived and have succeeded."

"Be that as it may," said Pipperly again, in his excitement removing his cigar and dropping the ashes and some of the sparks on his trousers. The stranger pointed with his index-finger, and the sentence was broken for the moment by the exigencies of the situation, as the speaker had to get up and shake himself to prevent unpleasant consequences. "Excuse," he said, resuming, "my venturing to say so; but I speak sincerely. You are, at all events, a remarkable man—a very remarkable man."

"Modesty suggests that I should contradict you," was the retort; "because I have never done anything more remarkable than making a tolerable fortune."

"It requires brains to make one."

"Granted; but not always one's own. However, it is some little satisfaction to me to feel that, what I have I fairly earned."

Mr Pipperly, with the instinct of a gentleman, changed the subject. He did not wish to pry into the stranger's private affairs, or to seem to be inquisitive on such personal matters.

"You have travelled?" he inquired, tentatively.

"Well, no. Not in the usually accepted sense of having visited many countries; but in the literal sense of covering distance, and totting up mere miles, I have travelled."

The discovery, not yet made by Mr Pipperly, has probably been made before now by the reader—the identity of Adrian.

"I have crossed the ocean to and from the antipodes; and now I am endeavouring to make my way to a place of which perhaps you may know something—Scottowe."

"That's most extraordinary! I am going there."

"How very fortunate!"

"Can it be possible that you are—Mr Adrian Verney?"

"I am the man known as Verney for years past; but I am, in reality, the son of General Bynge-Hudson."

"You astonish me still more! I did not know he had a son."

Here Adrian related, in a general way, some facts new to Mr Pipperly, not sparing himself in giving his own history; and finally telling how, through a lifetime, he had believed his father dead; and how quite recently he had found him alive, and had been reconciled.

"I went to Westerly on other business;

and there, by the merest chance, I saw his name in a local paper, in connection with some religious meeting. I found I had been deceived as to his death, by a distant relative for his own ends; but the deceiver is dead himself, and all is well that ends well."

Mr Pipperly knew all about Adrian's business to Westerly; so he made a plunge into business forthwith. Here was the very man he wanted, who was to relieve him of the purchase which he had made against his will and judgment. "I have just become the owner, in trust, for a friend of mine, of the fine old mansion and adjoining estate of Scottowe," he said, not wishing to depreciate his wares, which he hoped to sell again.

"Then my mission has been frustrated, I fear. I was bent on the same business. It was the one thing on which I had set my heart. I had a special object in it."

"My dear sir," put in Mr Pipperly,

soothingly, stroking his companion's knee, "I know all about it, from beginning to end, both from your *protégée* and from Miss Harman, my friend and client, whose object and yours, let me tell you, are identical. She bought as a mere matter of sentiment—a mistaken sense of duty—a fancied obligation which had no solid foundation either in reason or in fact: to be candid with you, a mere heart-freak. The gentleman to whom she is engaged, an officer on active foreign service, left her the temporary guardianship of the young wife of a soldier friend. She is now a widow, with an infant son. The boy is the last of his name; and the boy's father had a romantic feeling about the 'cradle of his race.' If I don't mistake, his young widow—this Mrs Scottowe—is the same in whom you are interested."

"Yes; I went to Westerly expressly to find her. I did not know her husband was dead. Poor thing! I am indeed deeply

interested in her—more so now than ever. I knew her as a child. Her mother was very dear to me. I am a well-to-do man with no family ties; and, coming back to end my days here, I looked forward to the gratification of doing for Kate what now can't be done, since the place has been purchased. There are many reasons why I regret that you have forestalled me. Have you absolutely completed the purchase?"

"Yes," said Mr Pipperly, delighted to see so much anxiety on the part of Adrian; "our offer has been finally accepted by the Courts. But I may tell you that Miss Harman will probably be willing to re-sell her interest to you—in fact she has said so to myself, and it was only on this condition that I consented to act in the matter."

This was a flim-flam to a certain extent, as we know; but there was enough truth in it to be satisfactory to Adrian.

"With a fair advance, which I can recom-

mend from a purely business point of view—your objects being, as I said, the same—there will be no difficulty. But business is business, as you understand. And I, as Miss Harman's guardian and trustee——"

"Oh! of course—of course," said Adrian.

"From a business point of view, then, I think I may safely promise that your wishes will be realised. When you have seen the place communicate with me." Here he gave Adrian a card on which he had written his address. "Probably an advance of, say, five per cent on the transaction would meet the case."

"May I take it as settled?" asked Adrian.

"Well, really, I can't answer just yet positively; but I think —— I should say so," Mr Pipperly replied, cautiously, and withal just dubiously enough not to appear overjoyed; but secretly highly pleased. "I shall be there all to-morrow—that is, pre-

suming we only get within reasonable reach to-night. Perhaps you may be able to run over. You will stop at the rectory, which is not far off."

"If not to-morrow, then the next day."

"Very well. There is a lady in charge of the house, and she will show you over the place. I put up myself at Fawley, where there is a comfortable inn, six miles from Scottowe, with good post-horses."

"I will stay there with you to-night, if you don't object, and go on to-morrow to the rectory."

"I'll be only too delighted. They expect you?"

"Yes; but they do not know the day. Being a stranger, I was not able to be precise, not knowing distances. I am very glad indeed to have met you. You remember the old saying, 'The world is very small'?"

"'All things come to those who wait' is

another old saying," responded Pipperly; "here is the relief train."

After considerable bustle and excitement, caused by change of luggage and re-seating of passengers, a fresh start was made at last; and Bexley Junction was reached some hours after time without accident to life or limb.

A weary drive of another hour or so, brought our two travellers to the end of their day's journey, and landed them at Fawley Inn. Mr Pipperly was known and duly welcomed. A good fire and a comfortable repast, soon reconciled both to the situation. Things might have been much worse.

As they were going up to bed, it occurred to Mr Pipperly that he had omitted one piece of important news. "You were talking about the 'theory of compensation' to-day, sir. I forgot to call your attention to an illustration of it which may have special

interest to you. I believe that the young widow in whom you are so much interested is engaged, or about to be engaged, to another soldier—a good match in every way, and a fine fellow, a great favourite with us all when his regiment was quartered in Westerly—Lieutenant Bateman."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Adrian; "and it is just as well that you have told me. Good night."

Next morning they started in the same trap for Scottowe. Mr Pipperly got out and walked by a short cut to the manor-house, while Adrian drove on to the rectory. It was arranged that the trap was to call on the return journey to pick up Mr Pipperly.

Adrian was at heart a man of "Sabine gravity," but the loquacity of the driver did not allow of much mental repose; and the circumstances of the case were, it must be admitted, calculated to disturb the most equable and self-restrained nature. He

could not keep down a queer sensation as he approached the rectory; and his hand shook as he held the reins while the driver got down to open the avenue gate.

It was hardly to be wondered at. He had come back to England with the heart of a philanthropist, and the affectionate nature of a boy; and he was about to renew personal acquaintance with two persons whom he had befriended, and rescued from the fate of outcasts years ago. He had left England, an outcast himself, and a pauper: he was now a wealthy man.

"Misera est magni custodia censûs,"

says the satirist—How great care belongs to the possession of riches! and when those riches are accumulated by the degradation of our fellow-men, how awful the responsibility! This responsibility cannot be shirked or evaded, my good sir, nor condoned by great gifts, which win for the donor, at no

sacrifice of personal comfort—no curtailment of luxury—the name of a public benefactor. Worldly titles and much human exaltation may follow; but when the final balancing of accounts takes place, of what avail are such gifts from the overflowing exchequer of the millionaire, who may be at heart—and relatively to many a person who gives nothing—a miser? On the other hand, is it true, as has been asserted, that laudations of poverty come invariably from those who have never felt the pinch of want? Manifestly, an experience of both phases is needed before a correct estimate can be formed; and I am not in a position to be impartial.

You turn on me, and say it is all very well to moralise. Very likely I am not a whit better than you are, or than anybody else is; but, all the same, my facts remain facts, and there are poor men richer than the millionaire. In the words of another pagan, it is great riches to subsist on little

with content, for *est umquam penuria parvi* — of a little there is always plenty. I don't object to people being rich; personally I should rather like to be wealthy: I only protest against riches being called virtue and being treated accordingly. Church and State may applaud and pet you for the act of giving; but if you don't pinch or inconvenience yourself in any way whatever, you may pose as a philanthropist, but your donative investments, be they ever so large, won't "pay" in the Great Beyond. God is not mocked, I say—subject, of course, to the saving clause which modern thought demands—namely, that there be a God and a Great Beyond.

This is all suggested by what was passing through the mind of Adrian. As a moral tonic, a sort of penitential "pick-me-up" retrospect is good. He was a rich man, but his money had all been made by flocks and herds, and by honest hard work; and

he had come home to make good use of it.

He was sure of a warm welcome at the rectory, and he got it. Such a commotion as there was when he arrived! The whole household had been on the tiptoe of expectation, and on the watch for several days. Georgie was the first to hear the sound of the approaching vehicle; and he was surrounded before he well knew where he was. Servants, dogs, Georgie's tom-cat, all joined in the general jubilation; and, in less time than it took to write, he ceased to be a stranger, or even a guest, and became "one of the family."

CHAPTER IX.

EXPLANATIONS.

"Nor now, to prove our chance,
Longer we'll tarry."
—DRAYTON.

PIPPERLY waited in vain for Adrian to put in an appearance at Scottowe Manor. He hoped to have been in a position to take back to Lavinia a written proposal for the repurchase of the place at a substantial premium, which would have been at once a satisfactory termination to the business he had in hand, and a practical testimony to his shrewdness and capacity.

But it was not to be wondered at that he was disappointed. There was so much to be talked about at the rectory, that Adrian's time for several days was fully

occupied. Joe and Kate both felt as if they could "never make enough of him"; and to himself the situation was interesting, novel, and absorbing. His affectionate nature warmed to these two, who had been, and were still in the highest sense, his children—since to him they might be said to owe their lives, certainly their fortunes.

He soon felt quite at home with Georgie, who had the sentiment of hospitality largely developed; backed up by that subtle charm which banishes all sense of shyness and restraint on the part of the guest. There are, as everybody knows, people who welcome you and are profuse, lavish, and demonstrative in their kindness, yet do not succeed in making one feel at home; and there are others who, without any effort, convince you at once that you are welcome, and that, moreover, your stay will conduce to their gratification. This is a gift, and Georgie had it.

The first serious difficulty and diversity of opinion which arose was as to the title by which Adrian was to be familiarly known in the household. It was at last settled, to the satisfaction of all parties, that he was to be called "Uncle" Adrian,—a decision which was not arrived at till the evening of the second day—after tea—as the four sat together round the drawing-room fire. It succeeded, and was led up to by the kissing stage—Georgie taking an active part.

When matters had thus far satisfactorily progressed, and Kate had been, as usual, suddenly called away to baby by the faithful and vigilant Bridget, Adrian said—

"Now, Joe, you and Mrs Tinkler, just get up closer. I want to tell you something."

"Not unless you call me 'Georgie.' You know that was part of the agreement."

"Very well — Georgie then. You must know, as a very great secret—at least it was

a very great secret, but isn't going to be any longer. Are you very much interested, Georgie?"

"Oh, not a bit," said she; "only you may as well go on, like a dear, good uncle, and get it over—as I daresay it has been a trouble to your conscience."

"Many a shot fired at random takes effect, Georgie—perhaps it has. At all events, I am now going to make a clean breast of it. I am not Adrian Verney, but—quite another man."

"Good gracious!" said Georgie, with quite a start, and jumping her chair as close to him as it would go; "how strange! Oh, do tell us all about it! Let me call Kate."

"No, Georgie," he said, suddenly grasping her by the wrist; "only you and Joe—at present."

The story he unfolded is partly known to our readers, but it was altogether new

to Georgie, and most of it unknown to Joe. He told them first of his parentage, and of how in early life he had nearly broken the heart of his father by wild, disreputable, and unfeeling dissipation; and he did not spare himself, or strive to extenuate himself, during the narration; how they had been for long years separated, believing each other to be dead; and how they had very recently come together by a mere chance, and been reconciled. He told how, in distant lands, repentance and remorse came upon him; and how he had endeavoured, when fortune smiled on him, to do all the good he could with the wealth and means at his disposal. Then he touched lightly upon his successful efforts in behalf of Tinkler and Kate; dwelling on Joe's devotion to her, and on his many other sterling qualities as a man, which made Georgie's heart glow with satisfaction.

"And now," he said, "my dear girl, I

have set myself to achieve one object in life, before I settle down to old age and inactivity; and that is, to provide for Kate and Kate's boy, in the way which the father would probably have most appreciated (as I gather from her letter written to me before his death),—by connecting once again the name with the place from which it is derived. Hugh, if he lives, shall be Scottowe of Scottowe."

Georgie did not speak; but she looked anxiously for information, with a questioning expression of the eyes: she did not like to interrupt by speaking.

"I'll buy Scottowe," he went on; "and will settle it on the boy, after my death. Kate shall come and housekeep, if her new husband will let her; and the child shall be my adopted son. I didn't want her to hear all this just yet—from myself. That is why I would not let you call her."

They were moved almost to tears by

the whole story—Joe and his wife—as was very natural. Georgie could only exclaim, after she had found her voice, that it was "all just more like a bit of a novel than real life."

"Ah!" he said, "real life is always like a novel—when the novel is true."

"But novels are never true," Georgie replied.

"They are, when they are good ones, and written by a master-hand; just as true as a great landscape painted by any great artist is also true, even though his scenery may be purely imaginary. And now, I want you to promise me one thing. You must just go, Georgie, and tell Kate that she is not to make a scene or a fuss about thanking me; because I never can stand that sort of thing. I look upon it as such utter waste. She may kiss me as much as ever she likes. I don't at all object to that; in fact I like being kissed by her—

and you: it's quite nice; but I hate a lot of gratitude, for a selfish act just done to please myself, and which is for my own enjoyment and satisfaction. Now good night; and mind you obey me."

"I am sure she will," put in Joe, getting up.

"You mustn't go," said Adrian to him; "I want to talk to you on matters of business."

Georgie, in a high state of excitement, rushed off to Kate.

"It is a noble and generous resolve," Tinkler remarked, as he shut the door after her, "but not more noble or generous than might have been expected." A "pish" and a deprecatory movement of the hand conveyed the intimation—as they drew their chairs together again—that eulogy was displeasing; so Tinkler turned, at a venture, to an expression of a doubt as to the success of the scheme as regarded Scottowe Manor,

Would Miss Harman consent? Having already purchased — as he understood from Mrs West — would she now relinquish her hold?

"I met her agent," Adrian explained, "as I travelled down; and as it appears that her object and mine are identical, there is no difficulty—at least none which cannot be got over. It is a mere question of pounds, shillings, and pence. And now, Joe, I have a fact to reveal to yourself alone. You have been, as I said before, the best of brothers to poor Kate, and it may be something of a shock to you to learn that—she is not your sister."

Joe was startled, and turned pale.

"Don't be upset: hear me out, she is quite near enough to be called so; and there is no need even to disabuse her mind on the point. You are children of the same father. He is dead these many years. I don't wish to pain you need-

lessly, but it is right that you should be made aware of the fact that he was not, my dear Joe," and here he put his hand kindly on the parson's shoulder, "he was not—a good man or an estimable man—from any point of view. This is a secret which you and I will keep to ourselves, for many reasons, and never divulge it — even to Georgie. There is no need that she should know. You are a son by a different mother. The story of Kate's mother is a sad one. Driven temporarily out of her mind by his brutal treatment of her at a time when the worst of men are supposed to show some trait of pity, some spark of humanity, she in her frenzy attempted her own life and that of Kate. I was fortunately able to save the child, and believed that I had also rescued the mother — whose pitiful case I knew—but she escaped from the place of refuge which I had provided; and in the dead of night, there is little doubt, she

succeeded in the second attempt to drown herself. The story is a sad one. There is no need that Kate should hear any of it."

"None, none," responded Tinkler, mournfully; "we have both cause to bless you."

They were silent by mutual understanding for a time. The story as told was not complete. There were portions of it which Adrian deliberately suppressed. Tinkler was not told that a stigma rested on his mother's reputation, and that the name he bore was hers and not his father's; but he would never know it now.

"To-morrow," said Adrian, purposely changing the subject, "I will visit Scottowe Manor, and you shall drive me over. I daresay you will be able to find parish work enough to keep you employed, while I poke about the place."

"Plenty," said Joe.

At this point there came to their ears a sound as of much scurrying about, and of

commotion outside. The door suddenly opened, and Georgie entered, followed by Kate, who was in "uncle" Adrian's arms in a moment, and far too overcome—even if she had been so disposed — to break through the injunctions laid upon her.

"Take them off to bed now, Joe—there's a good man," he said at last. "I must put you all out. I am going to smoke a cigar —if Georgie and Kate don't object, and if you don't."

He might have smoked in the drawing-room or the nursery, or even in Scottowe parish church just then, without let or hindrance from any one of the three.

He sat down by himself, with his feet on the fender; and by the way in which he lighted his cigar and threw away the match, it was easy to see that he had got into a brown study almost immediately.

You know the kind of person who will not shake hands with you when you want

to get away? You hold out your own in a tentative manner, and he won't take either it or the hint, but still keeps you button-holed; and you are too weak or too polite to rush away. The past got hold of Adrian in like fashion while he smoked; and old memories "linked" him whether he would or not.

Now there are those who potter about the shores of recollection, and call it retrospect; by whom the "waste of waters" have been unexplored; to whom the small boats about the harbour's verge have more interest than the great tempests, the wreckage — hope's flotsam and jetsam — or the fiery blood-red sunsets; souls that lack experience or imagination or both; who have never risked and never lost — or even mourned. It is the conventional belief that they are all the happier; perhaps they are: I do not know. But Adrian was not one of these, for he had both lost and suffered. Time

had indeed softened, but it had not obliterated, the outlines of his great sorrow.

The past all came suddenly back to him now; for the retrospect of the longest life may be momentary and yet exhaustive. Just as the eye, ranging over a vast expanse of scenery, passes by miles of moorland or pasture to concentrate and focus itself upon the homestead, the clump of trees, or the church tower far away on the extreme edge of the horizon: so it is with painful memory. The wearisome uninteresting waste is there; but far beyond it, or behind it, in the dim distance, lies the chief object of heart-vision—seen only by a keen process of introspection, which does not expend itself on intervening trifles, but on prominent objects. His recollection went back at a bound to the one great failure of his life—the loss of Kate's mother, whom he loved, and would have saved and cherished long years ago.

Success, from a worldly point of view, he had secured; but, from a mental and soul-satisfying one, his life had been incomplete.

That love can survive and continue through long years of regret has been proved over and over again by experience, and is acknowledged even by "the cynic"; but his philosophy advances the assertion that possession would probably have killed it. Adrian's heart was too large, his sympathies too wide, and his nature too tenderly retentive, to admit of any distrust, or disbelief in the heart's constancy, and love's unbroken continuity.

He sat out his cigar, and then meditatively betook himself to bed with a strange feeling of unrest about the heart, which would have puzzled a superstitious man, but which he easily accounted for by the turn which his reveries had taken, and the consequent awakening of long dormant memories and regrets. The banked-up fires were aglow,

and the extreme mental heat oppressed him —that was all.

Would he have been happier, I ask, if he had been a cynic? "There are sorrows and griefs so great," says Leigh Hunt, "that to give them some of the ordinary vents is to run a risk of being overthrown. We must bow in order to let them pass over us, as a traveller does a wind of the desert." But not thus does your cynic. If he even sees a ghost he sits down upon it, or runs his fist through it; and ultimately succeeds in banishing it by dint of reason and common-sense: it rarely survives the ordeal through which he puts it. He would have said to Adrian: "The beauty you rave about has probably faded; the romance is gone; or if the reality still survives in the flesh, it has very likely developed adipose tissue, or has lost the delicate outline, the exquisite bloom which belonged to youth and long ago. This may not be pleasant; but may it not be true?

"Ah! that long ago!

"If we cling to a delusion, we have only ourselves to blame for a rude awakening. Let the dead past bury its dead—and there an end of it: it is wiser for the most part. Be content with a headstone if you must, and leave it; but no disturbance of the sepulchre which Time has sealed, if you be wise. It is not necessary that you should finally determine whether the vault contains a cenotaph or a sarcophagus—if the body is not there."

I think myself there is a great deal to be said for the cynic. "Airy fairy Lillian," for instance, to whom Brown wrote those beautiful sonnets, married over twenty years ago Jones, the stockbroker. There was something in one of those sonnets about poetry of motion, and the dimpled chin. Now she waddles, and has dew-laps and three chins. She has, moreover—being the mother of many sons and daughters—no figure to speak of; but she is an estimable matron of the

conventional type — good, extremely good, but oh, how different!

Brown as a godfather is quite a success; as a husband he would have been, perhaps, a failure. But why speculate? He is a man of understanding, though a bachelor; and the banter of Robinson does not disconcert, but rather gives him comfort and enjoyment.

Mild cynicism acts as a healthy tonic to the mind; and the man who administers it is the real allopathist among the sages.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

"And hopes and fears that kindle hope,
And gentle wishes long subdued—
Subdued and cherished long."
—S. T. COLERIDGE.

THE disturbing thoughts of the previous evening did not appear to have had any lasting effect upon Adrian's spirits. He was the life and soul of the rectory breakfast-table, and there was contagion in his example. It was a bright and pleasant morning, crisp and frosty. Georgie arranged the programme for the day. Joe was to drive over to Scottowe with his visitor, who was warned on no account to lose his heart to Mrs West.

"Oh! you need not laugh," she said; "much stranger things have happened."

"That's really no reason why I shouldn't," said Adrian. "But why anticipate danger?"

"Because she is so handsome and so nice," put in Kate.

"Humph! You argue by analogy from your own case, I presume."

"Well, Kate, after such a barefaced compliment as that, I think you ought to blush," said Georgie.

"Well, I'm not going to," Kate retorted.

"No, of course not; you are too accustomed to that sort of thing, I have no doubt. You see, Georgie, use is second nature," continued Adrian.

"All the same, joking apart," Kate said, "I shouldn't at all wonder if you really just did go and lose your heart."

"But I haven't one to lose: I lost it ages ago; at all events I'll take the risk this time."

"She is very distant," Georgie explained; "and you've got to know her first. Only that she is so reserved, we'd have had her here often. But she won't come. She says she has 'a duty to perform,' and 'a trust to fulfil,' and can't be away long; but, now that you are going to dislodge her, perhaps she may be induced to pay us a visit."

"I won't dislodge her, perhaps. I may want to keep her on."

"But she is too proud to remain, I'm quite sure," said Kate.

"I think she likes Kate a great deal better than she likes me," put in Georgie in an explanatory sort of way; "and, do you know, sometimes I am inclined to be a bit jealous."

"Oh, I think it's just only the baby," Kate said: "there was nothing the baby would not account for. I told her the other day that I should teach him to call her 'granny,' and she seemed rather pleased."

"That's all very fine," said Georgie; "you may turn it off in that way, but the fact remains. It can't be helped. Can it, Joe?"

"No," said Joe, who had been wisely busy at his breakfast while this aimless chat was going on. "I think, all the same, that you might as well let the poor man finish his meal, and fortify himself for the ordeal which you seem to threaten him with."

"My dear fellow, I have finished ten minutes ago," Adrian explained. "If you don't mind we'll be off."

"What do you say to my dropping you at Scottowe Gate," Joe asked, when they were ready to start, "and leaving you to face the danger alone? I have lots to do, and I don't want to spoil sport — if there is to be any."

"Your plan will do admirably. I prefer to be alone, under the circumstances, as I

don't wish my weaknesses to be witnessed, and a report brought home for Kate and Georgie to amuse themselves over."

"Oh, we wouldn't laugh — indeed we wouldn't," Georgie protested.

"Wouldn't you? I doubt that. At all events, I don't mean to give you the chance."

They saw the two men off in the trap in a few moments. Joe had become quite an expert in the management of a horse, when sitting behind—not on him; and he twiddled his whip-lash round the handle in a manner which seemed to indicate that he was quite in his element in the position of driver. They started at such a spanking rate that the groom had enough to do to jump up. The distance to Scottowe Gate was soon covered.

"How long shall you be?" Adrian inquired, as he got down. "Probably I shall be ready before you are. But in any case,

don't hurry over parochial business on my account. I can easily walk back when I have had a look round. I can scratch a big cross on the gravel with my stick if I should pass out before you return; and if the cross is not there, you can drive up for me."

"Very well," said Tinkler, "that's settled;" and away he went to do a round of visiting among his parishioners.

The Gate lodge was shut up, and the shutters fastened, as the house was untenanted; but as there was no lock on the side wicket, Adrian opened it and entered. The avenue was a long and winding one, bordered by fine old trees, and flanked by luxurious underwood, and unkempt evergreens on both sides. Near the house there was a light iron fence and gates, inside which there was some appearance of neatness and order. An old man, scratching at the footpath with a rake, left off work at Adrian's approach; throwing a query into his look

which seemed to imply that he was too lazy, or too feeble to start a conversation.

"Can I see the place?" Adrian asked.

The old man nodded, and went on again with his work; but suddenly changing his mind, he dropped the rake and found his voice.

"It's took," he jerked out.

Adrian waited for a further development.

"I say it's took," the old man repeated, straightening his back, as though his body were trying to yawn; "leastways, I mean that it's sold—out an' out; an' you're late if you wants to buy. That's all I can tell 'e. Gent was here a few days ago and took possession. There was a lie-yer's clerk from London down to meet him; an' first he turned us all out, an' then he handed over the keys, an' gev us leave to go in again."

"I know all about that," Adrian explained. "Mr Pipperly is an acquaintance of mine."

"Pipperly—that's him as got possession, sure enough," said the old man, looking cheery, as his doubts were cleared away.

"I am also a friend of Mr Tinkler," Adrian added, seeing the good effect of the previous announcement; "in fact I'm staying at the rectory; and he tells me that Mrs West won't object to my going over the place—just out of curiosity."

"No more she won't, neither," replied the old man, picking up his rake again and pointing with it. "You go on straight till you come to the big beech beyant, an' turn down the path to the left; it'll take you right up to the house. You ring the bell. There's an ole dummon scrubbin' about and cleaning up inside; she'll show you up to Mrs West." And having finished all he intended to say, he resumed his occupation, and left Adrian to his own devices.

The surroundings charmed him; there was such an air of solitary repose and antique

simplicity about the grounds, and about the house, with its quaint Tudor gables, its mullioned and transomed windows, its terraces and its ivy-covered walls. There was no noise save the cawing of the rooks (which but serves to emphasise the silence of a deserted place), and no sign of life beyond their restless movements overhead. Everything was so still that he hesitated to awake the echoes by ringing at the bell; and he slackened his pace as he entered the *porte cochère*. Fortunately there was no need to ring, for the hall door was wide open; and the "ole dummon" inside it, on all-fours, was scrubbing at the tesselated pavement, bringing out with sweeps of her long arm and wet cloth the bright colours with a freshness born of water, and not made to last. When she discovered the presence of a stranger, she gave her frizzled old head a smoothing touch on both sides with her dripping hands, got up, and bobbed a curtsey.

He explained his object as lucidly as he could. "It is rather early in the day, I know; but will you tell the lady that I don't wish to disturb her? It is not necessary that she should see me. I am a friend of the family at the rectory. Perhaps she will allow you to show me about. Will you just kindly go and ask her? I'll wait."

The woman left off bobbing curtseys, and did as she was bid, and in a few minutes returned.

"Please, sir," she said, "Mrs West's compliments; and 'to be sure, of course—why not?' Will you just step into the library, and she'll come herself immediately?"

Adrian followed his guide, and was shown into the room indicated. The door was shut behind the retreating figure with a promptness which seemed to imply that she was glad to escape; and he found himself alone among the books. He was a man who loved such company; and a quarter of an hour

passed rapidly away as he dipped here and there into the contents of the shelves within easy reach, and finally settled down, on the stone window-seat of a quaintly tinted oriel, to the perusal of a choice copy of the 'Sententiæ Publii Syri.' The little book was daintily and handsomely bound, and had a richly gilt monogram stamped upon it. On the fly-leaf it moreover contained, in a quaint hand, a Latin tribute to the merits of its author, contrasting the mental freedom of this slave with the purple bondage of a Cæsar—who might, indeed, control the fate of thousands, but could not avert his own. Probably the volume had belonged to some early Chesterfield of the Scottowe race, who valued it as it deserved to be valued. It was long since Adrian had found himself in such congenial company; and so much was he interested and absorbed, that he did not hear the opening of the door nor the approaching footsteps of Mrs West.

She crossed the room and stood beside him before he was aware of her presence—a pale, handsome woman, with that rare combination of silver hair and finely pencilled jet-black eyebrows which has always such an exquisite charm, as seeming to somehow suggest the borderland, the neutral ground beween youth and age.

He turned, and hastily putting the book down, he rose and began—as he stepped out of the recess—to utter some words of apology for this early and unexpected visit.

They were face to face.

Suddenly, as if thrilled by the sound of his voice borne in upon her as an echo of the past, the statuesque figure underwent an emotional change, which seemed to transform and animate as if by some inward vivifying force. With a wild uplifting of the head she found her own voice, and cried in her agonised joy, "Adrian! Adrian!"

The sudden strain of this recognition was

too great, and the reaction came with startling rapidity. The words which she was about to utter died away upon her lips, and she would have fallen where she stood but for the instantly supporting arms of the true and tender-hearted man who had loved and lost and long since ceased to hope.

"Mine—mine!" he exclaimed; "mine at last!" as he clasped her to his breast with a strong embrace.

All this can hardly have taken the reader by surprise, and far back in the narrative it will probably have been guessed that Mrs West was none other than Mabel Scottowe. But to herself and to Adrian, a few moments back, nothing could have appeared less probable than that they should ever meet again, and — meet there. It is the unexpected which usually happens; and only our unpreparedness makes it strange.

After the great wave of emotion had passed over them, and its force had spent

itself, there succeeded a calm, during which they talked long and earnestly as they sat together in that secluded oriel.

His old love and all her faith and trust in him, which had been so many years hidden out of sight, revived.

The man who had wrecked her life was dead, and she could give herself now to the man who saved her from herself.

For the first time Adrian learned from her own lips the story of her early life and parentage — for in the old time she never disclosed to strangers the family name which she had sullied by that one false step of youth.

When, long ago, she awakened from her dream; when she found the reprobate for whom she had risked all, actually claimed by a disreputable woman as her property, she in her frenzied agony had attempted the destruction of herself and child.

She owed her rescue to Adrian; but the

thought of the murdered babe lay heavy on her soul. How she had contrived to escape his vigilance always puzzled him, and he believed her dead; but now she explained all.

With that skill which so generally goes with mental derangement she had quickly planned and as quickly executed a scheme of her own devising.

In the dead of night she had fled from the house of refuge, and getting on board a homeward-bound ship, contrived — by the assistance of the stewardess—to obtain the place of nurse to the infant son of a lady returning to England. This lady had been disappointed at the last moment, and thus Mabel got the vacant post. The lady's husband was a distinguished lawyer who had gone out to the colony to investigate facts connected with a great law case then pending in London—the result of which hinged on evidence which could not be procured at home; and he had taken his wife with

him for a change. The baby "took" to the strange woman, and she remained in the family as nursery governess for several years. Finally, after filling various situations, she—through this gentleman's assistance and influence—obtained the appointment which she now filled, and which she eagerly sought, having an intense desire to visit Scottowe once again, and if possible, to die there, unrecognised and utterly alone, with this terrible secret locked within her breast.

She knew, of course, that she was not responsible for her actions when, in her madness, she was guilty of the deed which deprived her of her child, and nearly ended in self-destruction. But she also knew that when she took the first foolish step which led to it all, she was not mad; and therefore it was that she never ceased to hold herself morally guilty, and was conscience-stricken and racked by torturing remorse

through all the long and bitter past; therefore it was that she had daily, almost hourly, reproached herself for the cowardice which urged her to fly from justice. But to have been tried and found guilty! To have been sent to a madhouse for life! or to have been hanged! O God! to think of either!

The wonder was how her reason stood the strain that came upon it, after having once given way; but in truth the derangement from which she suffered at the time was not the outcome of mental defects, but the result of mental disturbance, coupled with physical complications attending the birth of her child.

As she finished the pitiful story she put both palms together, and looking up at him with a yearning look, so wistful and so sad, hid herself in his embrace once more.

A sudden trouble came to embarrass him —a thought query which would assert itself, and demanded an answer—Was she devoid

of natural affection? If not out of regard and gratitude to him, it did seem strange that no instinct of even common curiosity had ever prompted her to seek him out, or to learn the fate of her infant daughter since that dreadful night.

"Mabel!" he said, tenderly, pressing her head to his breast—"Mabel! why—oh why did you make no sign, no——"

"Hush!" she cried, with a cowering pathos in her voice—"hush! I was afraid —afraid. Oh, have pity! Merciful God, forgive me!"

The clasped hands were suddenly uplifted and as suddenly dropped. Her voice fell to a terror-stricken whisper as she spoke. A convulsive shudder passed through her frame. Tears came to her relief for the first time since they had met. He saw it all as if by magic or by inspiration—the horror and remorse that followed her when she fled, and had haunted her till now!

She believed that she had taken that young life when attempting to destroy her own. She had lived for years under the conviction that she was guilty of murder, and this horror had been her constant companion night and day, in all the lonely years of misery through which she had passed!

His heart bled now to think of it. Be the consequences what they might, he must relieve her stricken soul from the weight of blood-guiltiness, and restore her to peace and happiness. He must tell her that Kate lived. It was cruelty, it was a crime, to keep this knowledge back from her.

He began cautiously and tenderly, leading up to the main issue cleverly and well. She listened motionless and still, till suddenly the drift of his words became clear, and the truth burst upon her in all its fulness. Then the form pressed with a greater and a sudden weight upon his

breast; the head fell drooping from its warm pillow, and the clasped hands relaxed their hold—she had fainted in his embrace. Tenderly he released himself; and supporting her in his arms, he opened the metal casement, and let in the cool, refreshing air upon the pale, terror-tortured, clearly-cut face—watching anxiously for the returning signs of life. She recovered slowly, to feel for the first time the warm, fervent pressure of his lips upon her own; and the silence which followed was full of solace and of healing.

A faint cry escaped her—an agonised sound which was half a sigh and half a mournful sob. She was dazed, and so overcome by the fulness of joy, when she recovered, that he did not think it wise or expedient to tell her all. He did not venture to disclose the fact that Kate was actually at the rectory, was known to her, had spoken to her, held her hand as a

mere stranger, a stray acquaintance! The strain would have been too great. There was nothing for it but to temporise in order to gain time—to suppress the truth, in fact, for another day, till he had matured his plans, and settled his line of advance. He met her eager importunities with a vigorous and decisive promptness of refusal, to which she had to submit. To-morrow she should know all. He would go back to the rectory and would telegraph; and in a few days —three at most—she should be restored to happiness and maternity.

And now, when the strain was removed and the difficulty tided over, the strong man succumbed—it was so hard to part even for a day. He needed moral support now in his turn: she gave it—the brave woman. He must go, she said; he would feel it less now than if he lingered. She wanted to be alone—it was best; and when he returned she would be quite calm, and

sufficiently recovered to bear all the good news in store for her.

There was no pledge of mutual faith either sought or given — it was not needed; for into the hearts of both had entered the settled conviction that fate had brought them together to be united; and that the tie would never be broken which bound them to each other.

Once, and once only, during the interview, did Adrian mention the hated name of her husband; and he did so only to assure her that no stain rested upon her or upon her daughter. The name was never to be mentioned again — he promised. She was to be known as Mrs West. This was a condition with which it was not difficult to comply. It would soon be changed to his own, and the unhappy record of the past be crushed out by the incidents of a bright and happy present.

Pathos is not my forte, else would this

chapter have been the most interesting of all. I have seized only on the leading facts, and have left the depths of sentiment unfathomed and undisturbed. From a sense of inadequacy I have been obliged to leave much to conjecture, and to let the reader fill in some of those delicate touches which a true word-artist would perhaps have elaborated. But surely the bare facts are eloquent enough, and no apology is needed; something must be left to the imagination of those for whom I cater.

I doubt, indeed, if it would be possible to unravel or describe the tangled state of feeling and of sentiment, of love and of remorse, of sorrow and of joy, of self-reproach and gratulation, which existed in the breast of Mabel as he departed, and she sat, motionless and silent, listening to his footfall in the corridor.

A sudden impulse caused him to retrace those steps. He had not told her his inten-

tions with regard to the place itself; and it would be an intense satisfaction and solace to her to know them—therefore it was that he came back.

"And now, Mabel," he said, as he released her once again, reluctantly, from his loving arms, "I have great confidence in your reserve of power. Will you do one thing for the man who loves you better than his life?"

"Adrian," she replied, "my good angel, my saviour, I am yours body and soul, heart and will. Rule me, guide me, order me—do as you list."

"Will you promise me to be strong?"

"Oh yes—very strong."

"Can you bear two—three days of suspense such as this which I ask you to endure?"

"I can. Have no fear, Adrian. If I have lived through this long horror-tainted past without a thought of self-destruction,

can I not bear a few short hours with all this happiness in store?"

He felt that the tension and the strain were passed; and before he left her he was fully assured that her strength of will and nerve had returned, and that she was safe from any disturbing reaction or relapse. The tears would come again, no doubt, when he was gone, but they would only bring relief. As for himself, was he not of the so-called sterner sex?

Now, when a man attains to any very sudden good fortune or to a great acquisition of happiness, the strong point of his disposition, whatever it may be, is forthwith displayed, and the most pronounced characteristic asserts itself—his "bent" comes to the front. Adrian was a large-hearted, generous man, and this unexpected influx of joy called forth therefore, cumulatively, all his benevolent instincts. For instance, he felt that he could not pass by that aged female who had

ushered him into the house without a gift in coin, which she had to dry her hand to receive with due respect, and which by its value seemed to take away the power of speech. She bobbed a series of curtseys, and quite forgot to let him out; so that he had to open the door for himself, while she gazed after him wonder-bound. The man with the rake came in for a similar gratuity. And when the two compared notes later on, they could only conclude that he must be either a lord or daft—the female holding to the former theory, the male as stoutly maintaining the other. She formed her conclusions from a dim recollection of the heroes of her youth, who were always noblemen in disguise, who fell in love with pretty and virtuous servant-maids, married them, and lived happy ever after. But his knowledge of the peerage was based exclusively on the enviable freedom of the "upper ten," as exemplified in the familiar proverb, "drunk as a lord";

and as Adrian was undoubtedly sober, there was no alternative but the one which the old man advanced. With such conflicting data to go upon, what wonder if the two differed thus widely in their conclusions? Finally, however, they came to the mutual agreement that, no matter which he was, he was liberal and free-handed.

But the instinct of giving was not new to Adrian—it was no sudden impulse born of the moment, though the amount might vary according to circumstances and emotions. There are those who argue against "gratuities to servants"; and in the dull season we see columns taken up with a discussion of the subject in the public press. It is demoralising, and so forth. You are valued, people say, by the menial according to your largess; the standard of worth is illusory, invidious, and the gift does no real good. I say it does good, to the donor, if it keeps his heart open; and as to the standard

of merit, what sounder is there for inferiors to judge by? You are flattered and toadied by your equals according to the extent of your wealth—valued, in fact, by the very same standard—money. Is this appraisement more estimable than the thanks and gratitude of the humble, who judge you by the higher test of your generosity? The thanks you get from these latter is all they have to bestow; they gauge you by your liberality, having no better means of arriving at a conclusion. Are they not less to be despised than those others in your own rank, who value you not for what you give but what you own; and who will not know you by-and-by if you "go smash"? Understand me. I don't mean to insinuate that there is any likelihood of such a disaster. I merely say to you—my friend, give to the civil porter, the attentive housemaid, the unlovely "boots," the assiduous waiter; and let rigid social economists prate about "promiscuous

almsgiving" and the enormity of over-paying a cabby.

Adrian scratched with his walking-stick on the gravel outside the gate the prearranged signal for Joe, and set off rapidly for the rectory. He had plenty to occupy his thoughts. Both Tinkler and Georgie must be taken into the plot, and be consulted as to how to break the joyous news to Kate; and lest the facts should be too much for him to keep till next day, he resolved not to say anything immediately to Georgie, but to wait for a private interview with her husband as the safest initial step. The whole business required nice management; but the chief difficulty would be to maintain an outward aspect of unconcern, which should not awake suspicion or precipitate a premature disclosure.

How strangely had the light banter of the breakfast-table found confirmation and fulfilment! The situation called for the utmost

power of self-control; and as he neared the rectory gate, he almost determined that he would not put himself to the test, but would resort to that womanly expedient, "a bad headache," and plead his temporary indisposition as an excuse for keeping out of sight. This would have the double advantage of securing some quiet hours for maturing his plans.

CHAPTER XI.

DEVELOPMENTS.

"But, if ye are resolved to marry, God b' w' ye."
—FARQUHAR.

"A scheme
To make your orphan-ward an instrument."
—LORD LYTTON.

"I must away,
And it is meet I presently set forth."
—SHAKESPEARE.

FORTUNE favoured Adrian to an unusual degree, removing the necessity for the fictitious indisposition and consequent retirement to the solitude of his chamber. When he arrived he found the most intense excitement prevailing at the rectory.

A telegram had just been received from Bateman, announcing his intention to be there in time for dinner. His letter to Kate, of the day before, was written from Dublin,

in which there were only vague threats of "turning up," but nothing definite. He wasn't expected for a week. He must have made up his mind on the instant, and travelled all night. When was the telegram sent? From where did it come? How long was it on the road? Ever so many important questions of a like sort had to be asked and re-asked, and discussed over and over again, by Georgie and Kate.

Nobody noticed Adrian in the bustle and hurry and gladness; so that, as it turned out, if he had laid down the lines for himself he could not have engineered them better. When our big lieutenant did, in due time, put in an appearance, a sense of gratitude added, if possible, a greater cordiality to the reception which Adrian gave him on their first introduction to each other —evoking a response from Bateman, in Kate's presence, to the effect that, though doubtless she flattered herself that she was

the attraction which brought him back in a hurry, it was quite a mistake, as it was entirely a wish to make "uncle" Adrian's acquaintance. He wasn't believed; but he didn't expect to be — so it was all right. All the same, he was in uproarious spirits, which couldn't be repressed or guided.

As a matter of fact, he had come back to take away Kate. He was growing impatient of delay. He would not wait. The ceremony was to be performed by Joe. It was all right; he had got his special licence! So when Tinkler returned there was more excitement than ever, and laughter, and high spirits, in the midst of which Adrian retired, and was hardly missed, particularly as his praises had to be sung, and the changes rung on his good qualities, for Bateman's benefit, by Kate and Georgie, who declared that he had not heard it all before — or half of it — as it was impossible to get it into their letters: besides, there were other

things to fill *them.* By-and-by the lovers paired off; Georgie betook herself to her household duties; and Joe retired, for a quiet hour, to his study, to make notes for his next Sunday's sermon.

Dinner passed off splendidly, so that Adrian's high-strung reserve was unassailed save by some passing pleasantry now and then, which he easily turned into a different channel; and while the others chatted and laughed, he laid down his line of action, and matured his programme. It worked admirably, and without the slightest hitch. After tea Bateman had to pay a visit to the nursery, as a matter of course, not only to see Hugh asleep, but also to greet his worthy countrywoman, the faithful Bridget, in whose eyes he was the personification of everything admirable. When he and Kate returned to the drawing-room, they were (with that peculiar adaptability of lovers to circumstances) quite content to

find it empty, and mutually set it all down to Georgie's thoughtfulness—giving her credit, if not for more kindness than she possessed, at least for more skill and diplomacy.

It was late when the animated conversation in the study ended, and Adrian had come to a full understanding with Joe and Georgie. The gravity of the situation was fully taken in by both. In her delighted excitement she rose to the occasion, showing much force of character and sound common-sense. She fully realised how great a responsibility was thrown upon her, and how necessary it was that she should not break down or fail to play her part in the domestic drama with self-control and discretion. "It was a great strain to put upon her," Adrian said, but it could not possibly be avoided; and without a woman, and a sensible one, in such an emergency, the crisis might be too much for Kate.

"And now," said he, looking at his watch,

only to discover how very late it was, "I trust to you implicitly. You must get her to bed. To-morrow—if all goes well—we'll be the happiest household that has ever figured in the wildest of romances. Bateman has yet to be schooled; so you must send him in for Joe and me to take in hand, and into confidence, before we retire."

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't tell Fitz, whatever you do!" exclaimed Georgie. "He's such a chatterer, he'll spoil all."

"Not a bit of it," said Joe, confidently. "Don't you be afraid. You'll find he'll be of the greatest use to us to-morrow."

"Of course he will," said Adrain. "You see what a capital unemotional buffer he'll make for us all to run against. Besides, he *must* be told: if he wasn't, there's no knowing how he might upset all our plans. A bull in a china shop would be nothing to him."

And so he was told. He listened with

a wild amazement. He could hardly believe the whole story at first, but when he did, he sobered down to rationality and common-sense.

"And, by Jove!" he exclaimed, by way of final comment, as he threw away his cigar-end, "look here, sir! if I had been asked to pick and choose a mother-in-law, I could not have hoped to make a better selection."

"The compliment to her is well deserved —how well you have yet to fully discover," replied Adrian. "A father-in-law, or step-father-in-law, don't count for much one way or other."

"Oh, doesn't he, though!" responded Fitz, warmly, with a grasp which spoke volumes, as they separated with this big and strange secret between them, for the night.

Georgie laid the train without delay. She went into Kate's bedroom and told her in

confidence to prepare for the biggest of big and delightful surprises that ever could be thought of or imagined.

"It is just no use in the world," she said, in response to Kate's futile efforts to solve the mystery; "because if you were to guess and guess, and guess ever so hard, you couldn't come within miles of it—so there!" and then she fled, deaf to all entreaties. It was a wise preliminary step to take, and Joe thoroughly approved of it, as it would serve to break the suddenness of to-morrow's discovery when it came.

Adrian went next morning to Scottowe and induced Mabel to accompany him to the rectory, to be there when the sham reply to his imaginary telegram arrived. "Mrs Tinkler wished it," he said, "and they all wished it." So she consented, having apparently got over all the great agitation of the previous day, and somehow recovered the peculiar beauty and charm of expres-

sion of long ago, which he remembered so well, and which was associated with her smile: the clouds which obscured it were drifting away, and the sunshine of happiness was all that was needed to make her, in his estimation, as beautiful as ever.

Let us pass over now all preliminary stratagems and plans; and condoning his lapses from strict truth in reference to the telegrams, let us lift the curtain on the consummation, after the great rush of excitement has swept over the principal actors, and the after-calm has set in,—Kate and her mother locked in each other's embrace; Georgie holding the baby while he waits for due recognition; the three men alert, and prepared for developments which now can only have an agreeable termination. No description, no analysis can add anything to the picture. What reader is there who cannot fill in the details promptly and feelingly? I hope not one.

It is enough for me to say that it took two whole days to bring the combined emotion down to anything like a normal condition, fit to take into rational consideration suggestions of a new departure as the outcome of the situation. There was to be another marriage besides Kate's; and Adrian was quite as impatient as Fitz. In fact, the unexpected turn which things had taken, and the overwhelming joy which followed the events which we have narrated, had thrust aside altogether the promise which he had made to his father. He had not even written, when he found himself recalled to a sense of duty by the receipt of a communication from Tyson, the soldier-servant, announcing the sudden illness of the Major-General, and asking him to hasten his movements, as he (Tyson) didn't feel equal to the complications which had suddenly arisen.

There was no danger now in leaving the rectory. It was clearly his duty to go at

once; and there were two important things to be done which fitted in nicely with the journey. He had to arrange with Mrs Pipperly and Lavinia as to the re-purchase of Scottowe; and he had to bring back a special licence, without which Bateman declared he would not permit him to re-enter the premises. It was settled that the two marriages should take place on the same day in the quietest way possible; and so Adrian departed.

When he reached Westerly, he found his father greatly changed — so broken in so short a time as to cause serious alarm.

In Tyson's opinion it was "prayers was a-knockin' of him over. If he could be got to quit 'em for a spell, sir, I don't doubt," he said, "but we'd soon pick him up. Furthermore, sir, I make bold to say he might lawfully and without offence take a bit of a rest; seeing he has done enough in that line to entitle him fairly to furlough. Leastways,

sir, he ought to be well in advance of the enemy by this time."

Tyson reasoned according to his lights, and out of the most genuine love and concern for his master, without a shade of profanity or levity in his remarks—for he was incapable of either; a hard and sober man, without humour, who spoke only of necessity, or from settled conviction. But the cure which he suggested was impracticable.

Adrian went to consult Dr Collyrium, to whom, in any case, as Georgie's father, he felt he owed a visit. The doctor was of opinion that Tyson's suggestion had a great deal of common-sense in it, but that it came too late. The Major-General could not now be broken of a habit which had become second nature. Like any other habit indulged in to excess, it could not suddenly be given up, even by a much younger man, without great risk: at his age the difficulties and dangers were increased a hundred-fold.

"These devotional and highly emotional exercises, my dear sir, are," said the doctor, "stimulants pure and simple. You have some chance with the excessive dram-drinker, or the smoker; but the medical man is powerless when he comes to deal with a religious enthusiast, and he should be particularly cautious when the patient is a man of extreme old age."

"Of course—yes. I quite see all that," said Adrian, in his perplexity; "but what would you advise me to do?"

"Well," said the doctor, holding his chin in his hand, meditatively, for a moment, "I'd advise you to proceed with all the matters of business you have in hand, and that with all possible speed. You understand me? Bring your wife here, to live with the old man, or take him with you to Scottowe. There would be less risk in your coming to him, for many reasons; and your future wife—whose many good qualities

are known to me, through Georgie—would be invaluable to him: there is nothing like a lady in the house. Cheer him up, and he may last for many years longer. Give him an interest in life. The great danger is that he may settle down into melancholy, and his mind may go at any moment."

The advice seemed sound and reasonable; and as it fell in with his own views, Adrian lost no time in giving it effect. He had to explain all to his father; both to prepare him for the change and reconcile him to his own second departure. It was a satisfaction to observe that the doctor's advice, as far as it could be tested, had turned out satisfactorily, as the old man received the announcement of the projected marriage, and the prospect of seeing his daughter-in-law, with manifest interest and gratification; and the news aroused a stimulating curiosity which had a most salutary effect

upon him, by diverting his thoughts into another channel.

Lavinia, who had heard all the facts about Kate and her mother from Georgie, and from Mrs Pipperly all about Adrian's wish to re-purchase Scottowe (and his intention to settle it ultimately upon Kate's son), did all in her power to hasten matters, and to avoid unnecessary delay. But there were certain things which she could not do. Pipperly would not be driven, and he insisted on making his own terms as to the re-sale.

These were finally agreed to by Adrian, who went back to the rectory with the special licence in his pocket, and a good sound reason—over and above a selfish one—for insisting on a speedy realisation of his hopes and wishes.

For his father's sake he must be married immediately. The matter would brook no delay. Dr Collyrium's prescription must

be followed forthwith. And thus it came about that he found himself thoroughly at one with Bateman, who said he was determined to have his part of the interesting ceremony performed on the self-same day, by Tinkler, and at the earliest possible date after Adrian's return to the rectory.

Only one small cloud loomed now in the distance; but what magnitude it might assume was an open question. The uncertainty caused apprehension in the mind of Georgie, and she spoke to Joe and Adrian about it on the first opportunity, when she heard that the day was really fixed. How would the poor mother bear the parting from Kate? There was the doubtful point and the serious point. They all three felt it when it came to be put.

"If we could break the blow in any way," Georgie said, speaking to herself rather than to either of the men, "it would be a great matter."

"Yes; and there's the baby, too," put in Joe, as a Job's comforter. "It would be hard to say which she is fondest of. If she has to leave them both, I'm afraid it will drive her out of her mind."

Adrian winced at the chance shot, as he thought of how, once before, her reason had given way, and of that dreadful secret which Tinkler's words brought back to memory.

"Georgie," he exclaimed in his perplexity, "what is to be done? I look to you to help us all over this difficulty, which in my selfish satisfaction never once occurred to me. But I see it all now, and how real the danger is. My inability as a husband to cope with any combination of difficulties seemed so remote as never to give me a thought. But now——"

"That's always the way with husbands—isn't it, Joe?" said Georgie.

Tinkler assented with a nod, as much to

prevent discussion and for peace' sake as for any better reason.

"You dear old thing!" went on Georgie. "And no doubt you think you are everybody and everything, and that I never could get on without you. It seems absurd coming to me for advice, because really and truly I am perplexed and frightened."

There was a pause, during which they vaguely looked at one another, overpowered by the sense of possibly grave complications at the last moment, with which they might be utterly unable to grapple.

"I have it!" said Georgie, with a sudden inspiration. "The baby must be left to his grandmother—there's nothing else for it."

The idea was so unexpectedly audacious that both men were taken aback by it, and abstained from making any remark on the instant — having nothing to say which would meet the difficulties involved in the suggestion.

"If she gets Hugh all to herself to mind and take charge of while Kate is away on her wedding-trip, it will be all right."

"But Kate herself——" feebly began Adrian.

"Never mind," said Georgie, making for the door.

"There are difficulties still," added Tinkler. He, too, was cut short before he could finish his sentence.

"Leave them to me," she said; "you just don't trouble." And so saying she went in quest of Bateman. Having captured him, she brought him straight to the point and told him all — winding up with a solemn uplifting of the first finger as she finished.

"Now you just don't go and spoil all by being obstinate and selfish, and raising objections. You'll have to support me, Fitz —won't you? There's a dear." And now the tone changed to one of pathetic entreaty.

He looked down at her with a big smile overspreading his face. "I'm to give up Hugh?"

"Yes; why not? He doesn't really belong to you at all."

"Are you going to put it as a duty or a favour? There's nothing like having a clear understanding." He spoke in a good-natured tantalising way.

"Ah!" she said, "don't keep me in suspense. Put it any way you like, only don't be selfish and nasty about it."

"That's all very well," said Fitz, "but don't you know in your heart that we men are all actuated by pure selfishness?"

"I don't know anything of the kind, and I don't believe it; and I don't believe that you are—one bit."

"Well, we like to be flattered,—I do: it's quite nice. But you know, joking apart, that not only am I extremely fond of that little chap already, but that I have an

object in view which will be altogether frustrated if I comply?"

"Oh yes, I know all about that," Georgie retorted, impatiently; "such an utterly absurd idea! Kate told me all about it. The notion of you not liking to go on your wedding-trip without a baby, because people would stare so if they thought you were newly married. Why, I declare you are a bigger baby than Hugh!"

"Well, I admit it does sound ridiculous; but all the same I'd rather have him—just to take the edge off vulgar curiosity. People don't stare if they think you are a twelve-month old Benedick. It makes all the difference."

"It would make no difference except to encourage you in a piece of deception. They'd stare just as much, because Kate is so pretty. Besides, I never will speak to you again if you don't do what I want —so there!"

Georgie's "So there!" had immense power in it always. The good-natured Bateman gave in at last; and having won him over, she marched him straight off to the nursery, where Hugh just then ruled supreme. She could count now on Kate being in a minority of one, so that there was no doubt about ultimately conquering her — Bridget being neutral. There was a vigorous contest while it lasted; but when Kate found that even Fitz had deserted her, she gave in, with Bridget, at her own request, thrown in. To Mabel the consignment was an intense delight; and there can be no second opinion as to the wisdom shown by Georgie in carrying out a scheme which reflected equal credit on her head and heart. She had laid down the lines of attack so skilfully that, from the first, there was nothing for Kate but surrender. With Georgie and her own mother, Adrian, Tinkler, and Fitz, all against her, she must only make the

best terms she could, which were that this matchless baby should only be intrusted to his grandmother for one month "at the very outside."

Everybody was satisfied except Fitz, who was driven to find his only consolation in the feeling that he had really made the greatest sacrifice of all, and received the smallest acknowledgment and recognition of it.

It was settled that, when Kate returned to claim her boy, Adrian was to take up his residence at Scottowe with mother and daughter, and to formally install the future heir. Her heart was so full of hope, and sunshine, and gratitude, that she felt glad she had given way for her mother's sake. Mabel took possession of the boy as though he was now her own exclusive property; and a friendly jealousy at once sprang up between her and Bridget, which Hugh provokingly fostered by a strict impartiality

in dispensing his patronage, so that neither could claim a victory.

Adrian's only trouble was as to whether he should be able to safely get his father moved to Scottowe. At his time of life, and in his state of health, there was great risk. However, Tyson and he must, by-and-by, do their best when the time came—of course with Dr Collyrium to aid and advise.

CHAPTER XII.

PALLIDA MORS.

"Out of the world he must that once comes in;
No man exempted is."
—HERRICK.

"The duties by the lawn-robed prelate paid,
And the last words, that dust to dust conveyed!"
—TICKELL.

MABEL BARRY—or West, as we have known her—and Kate both changed their names under happy auspices on the same day. The Reverend Joseph Tinkler performed the ceremony in the most satisfactory manner. Of course, under the circumstances, everything was as quiet as it was possible to keep it; but neither mother nor daughter would be satisfied if the function had not been gone through in church—special licences notwithstanding.

It was atrociously improper and incorrect of Georgie, I admit—looking back now upon the whole business—to harbour Adrian and Fitz for days under the same roof with their intended wives. Mrs Husch and Mrs Canon Fungus would have been scandalised if it had come to their ears—and rightly scandalised; but I doubt if this would have weighed heavily on the minds and consciences of the two men. All the same, I repeat it was very wrong, and highly reprehensible, no doubt; and Georgie ought not to have allowed it.

Ah, well! it is all over now; but, my good sir, do you not remember how, in years gone by, you and I were wont to shirk and dodge those detestable proprieties, and to make very little of them in the days when——? But no: this is a profitless retrospect. Yet Eros is not dead, remember; and we have daughters now to whom Mrs Grundy has very kindly, and of her own motion, stood in the responsible capacity of social godmother,

and it behoves us to be reticent and discreet —to assume a virtue if we have it not.

Fitz returned with his bride to the paternal roof, without the smallest misgivings as to the result. He knew that there were warm hearts awaiting him, and Kate was surely born to love and be loved by everybody. She had that winning weakness of character which disarms hostility among women, allied to that beauty of figure and feature form and colour combined, which enlist the sympathies of men. We may safely see her off to Ireland, quite confident that she will soon become a prime favourite among her husband's relatives.

Adrian hastened, with Mabel and her young charge, to Westerly. Possessing her, he was content—the measure of his happiness was complete; but he could not quite shake off the feeling of anxiety about his aged father, which had in it a touch of self-reproach. Now there was no time to

be lost, and he did not pause to speculate on the complications likely to arise from any incompatibility of temper or theological differences. He relied on the good sense of his wife, and on his own tact, to avert any serious consequences; but, be the consequences what they might, his duty was clear, and that was to be near his father.

The old man dropped into the new order of things quite naturally. He received them with the stately old-time courtesy of the soldier and the gentleman; but there was a great change visible to Adrian.

The fire had died out, and life merely smouldered, as it were. The brightness of eye was dimmed, and the quickness of intellect gone. In fact, so manifest had this change been to the faithful Tyson, that he had his doubts about letting women into the house at all: it was therefore with feelings of satisfaction that he saw how Mabel's presence worked for good, and he took heart

thereat, and became tolerant and even friendly to Bridget. Hugh was kept in the background at first, as Mabel wished to make her own footing secure before she felt her way in any other direction. She was so quiet and equable, forceful and calm, that her presence gradually, indeed very soon, became a gratification and a reserve of strength to the old man, which was always watchfully, but unobtrusively, at his service.

Her devotion to him was only equalled by that of Adrian; but all this tender care was of little avail — the mind was surely and only too rapidly giving way.

When the novelty of their presence had worn off, he grew silent, and by degrees his memory seemed wholly to desert him, and to wander aimlessly among incidents of the long-forgotten past. But the most alarming symptom was the sudden decay of all religious enthusiasm which set in — the cessation of all theological combativeness. The

mental machinery had evidently worn out and failed. It was a break-down of both mind and body, which Dr Collyrium declared to be only what was natural, and reasonably to be expected. The system had given way, and was exhausted.

"You must look for nothing more, sir, now," said he, "than second childhood."

The association of ideas suggested Hugh.

"Do you think," Mabel asked, "that the presence of the baby would have a good or bad effect?"

"I don't know, my dear lady," responded the doctor. "It is really quite impossible to say in these cases, when a man begins to dote. But I think you might try the baby. It can't do any harm."

The experiment revived hope a little. The old man brightened up when he made the acquaintance of Hugh in a way which surprised everybody, and nobody more than the doctor; who thereupon, taking the

hint, adroitly availed himself of every opportunity to implant in the Major-General's enfeebled mind some fixed but vague idea of relationship and grandfatherhood. By diligent planting and nurture it took root, as even a stray seed will, and fructified. Tyson and Bridget were made parties to the plot, and enjoined to foster the delusion, since it was found to have such a beneficial effect; and Adrian and Mabel were, by force of circumstances, gradually and by acquiescence led into it. It was surely a harmless and well-intentioned fraud, and one which the most rigorous moralist might pardon.

Things got to such a pass soon that the old man could not bear to lose sight of the boy, and was restless and uneasy when away from him. He would sit silently and patiently watching by the bed while the child slept. Every turn and movement gave him concern, and the slightest cry

alarmed him into impatient calls for "Tyson! Tyson!" He seemed to ignore the presence of Bridget altogether, or to be unaware of her presence, till she put in her unavoidably periodical claims to co-proprietorship in the baby, and took possession of him to dress or undress. Perhaps it was not, after all, so much forgetfulness about Bridget, but rather that the failing memory, when a strain was put upon it, recalled more readily and with less effort the familiar name of Tyson, whose comment on the state of things was—

"Well, well, it's the foolishest end that ever I see, and the most sorrowful. A brave old sodger that never allowed the devil himself to get the upper hand, doctor—to look at him now, circumwented, upsat, and teetotally put about and bashed by a innocent babby!"

The patient's whole soul seemed wrapped up in Hugh; and for a time Mabel hoped

that the child would be the means of restoring him to some mental health and activity. But Adrian felt this to be impossible, — it was too late. The lamp of life had burned down too low, and the light was but a flickering in the socket, spasmodic and uncertain. His greatest happiness was to have the child in his sole keeping; and sometimes Mabel would take the boy up, and place him, sleeping, in the old man's arms; who would sit motionless and fond, with his precious burden in charge, till the familiar call, "Tyson! Tyson!" announced the fact that Master Hugh's eyes had suddenly opened, and his legs and arms had become too active to be controlled by his enfeebled custodian. To Mabel all this was a touching and beautiful experience.

They watched him anxiously, these loving souls. All saw that the end was not far off.

It came at last, peacefully and silently.

An agonised cry from Bridget, which rang through the house like an alarm-bell, told that the unbidden guest had entered and made good his footing.

While the young strong life lay sleeping calmly and unconsciously in his embrace, the old warrior passed away without a struggle, into silence and peace.

The scene was one to move the stoutest heart, as those around him endeavoured lovingly to separate the living from the dead. There was no call now for "Tyson! Tyson!" The familiar voice was hushed. But Hugh —awakened — wailed with the touching bitterness of childhood, as though nature had suddenly given to him some subtle prescience that the tenderly protective arms would clasp him no more,—some indefinable instinct which told him that the link between the future and the past was broken, and that the sympathetic heart was still. A like feeling must have crossed Mabel's mind as

she took the child and tried to comfort him: it stirred also the untutored emotions of Bridget to their lowest depth, as she stood sorrowfully silent in the background.

The two strong tearless men carried the dead away, and laid him on his camp-bed, with that respectful tenderness and solicitude which the awful reality of death evokes, but which the cold clay cannot appreciate or acknowledge; and yet how terribly eloquent is death, all voiceless and utterly silent though it be!

Adrian, bending, pressed his hot lips against the marble forehead, and smoothed the silvery hair as it lay upon the pillow. The noble features wore a placid smile, and had that peculiar look of returned youthfulness which the grim visitor puts on as if to mock us in our sorrow, and make regret more keen. When that regret is mingled with a sense of remorse, as in Adrian's case, who can gauge the agony of the living, or say how

far repentance may now avail, or the noble soul be comforted which has left the silent tenement of clay?

Tyson, seeing how greatly moved Adrian was, essayed to speak words of comfort to the best of his ability. "I make bold to say, sir, that at the last muster it will be all right. I am only a humble sodger, sir, but I make bold to say it—it will surely be all right. Amen! The Lord have mercy upon us!"

What more authoritative announcement could be made by bishop, priest, or deacon? None! The speculations of Plato on immortality have been formulated into "a sure and certain hope"; but beyond that hope, how much lies vague and undefined! Tyson had no philosophic doubts or misgivings. To him the anthropomorphic idea was alone intelligible, reasonable, and comforting; and that justice would be done he doubted not.

On the day of the funeral Westerly was in

mourning all along the line of route. Every shop had its shutters up, bearing silent witness to the esteem in which the deceased was held by all parties and creeds alike. He was buried, by special permission of the authorities, with full military honours; and a firing-party of his own corps of Sappers discharged the farewell volley over his grave. Who that has ever witnessed a soldier's funeral—be he private or general—can forget its profound melancholy and touching solemnity? The heart must be hard indeed that is not moved thereby.

On this occasion interest and pathos were added to the scene by the presence of the white-haired bishop, and by his short and eloquent discourse delivered at the grave. There were rigid Churchmen to whom his appearance at the ceremony betokened a tolerant laxity amounting to latitudinarianism; but to him this mattered little. He spoke for nearly a quarter of an hour—

burning words but simple withal, which went home to the hearts of his hearers.

"As in the body politic," he said in conclusion, "we find a great army devoted to the sovereign, composed of many regiments and many men, united against a common danger, so do we find in the Church militant a like combination enlisted under the banner of the King of kings, and making war against the enemy of our souls. Let us be thankful that this is so, and hold in due reverence the memory of this noble soldier, who has fallen in the service of the Cross. And therefore also, I say, quit ye like men! Be strong even as he, our departed brother, was strong! Be ye—also as he was—faithful unto death!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SUMMING UP.

"So here they're lodged,—
In faith a pretty nest."—HOOD.

I HAVE just returned from Scottowe, where I spent a most enjoyable fortnight in a quiet way with Adrian and his wife. Bateman and Kate were there. He has elected to continue his military career, to which he is so much attached, and he is now quartered somewhere in the North—at Edinburgh, I think. Hugh has been wisely left with his grandmother,—the idea being that, as he is ultimately to become Adrian's heir, and to succeed to the old place, it is highly desirable that he should become attached both to his benefactors and to it. Kate sees the

sense and reasonableness of this, and is quite reconciled to the temporary estrangement which is to redound so much to her boy's welfare and advantage. She knows that he will be well cared for. In fact, between Adrian and Mabel, Bridget and Tyson, he bids fair to have a "high old time" of it. Indeed they have all become so fond of him, that it is quite on the cards he may be spoiled. However, he is so young yet that it is rather premature to speculate; but we may be quite certain that he will not be neglected.

Tyson has already become jealous of the ascendancy of Bridget, and is most anxiously looking forward to the time when the little chap shall be relieved from what he contemptuously calls the control of "petticoat sergeants," and be handed over to him for that training which alone is manly and legitimate. But Bridget is tenacious of her rights, and equally jealous of her influence;

so that there is a bitter conflict looming in the distance, in which Master Hugh will himself by-and-by have some voice. It is a settled thing that he is to go into the army—as far as Tyson, of his own motion, can settle it.

Tyson has three rooted convictions—namely, that soldiering is the only profession for a gentleman to follow; that the army has gone to the devil; and that the "or'nary civilun ain't nowadays worth fightin' for." There is a fine inconsistency about the holding of these joint convictions: they are not logically on all-fours—they do not hang together. But what of that? I have myself known quite as incongruous convictions to be held, for which brave men have not hesitated to die, and which, in some cases, they have endeavoured to live up to—a far more difficult undertaking.

I learn by a letter just received from Tinkler that Miss Harman is expected at

the rectory for a short stay, and I am sorry that I shall miss her. I am reminded, by the mention of her name, that I have in the latter half of this narrative almost forgotten to chronicle her doings. She has, indeed, been crushed out by the emotional incidents connected with the advent of Adrian on the scene, and by the events which followed; but all the same her destiny has shaped itself, and her future may safely be surmised. The Major is on his way home; and, being less of an enthusiast as to his profession than our friend Fitzmaurice Bateman, is about to retire and to settle down as a country gentleman. Indeed Tyntern is already in the hands of the painters and decorators, so that much time will not elapse before it owns a mistress fit to grace the position, and whose presence within easy visiting distance of Scottowe will add an additional charm to that already favoured locality.

Now touching aunt Polly. If there is one

thing more than another which I hate it is eavesdropping, but when it is unintentional it may surely be pardoned. I came, the other day, upon a scene which has, to my mind, a certain significance. I saw Mr Pipperly holding her right hand in both his own, very much as I used to hold a bird's nest full of eggs, in the days when I made raids upon the occupants of the hedge-row, and intense gratification called forth the utmost solicitude about, and tenderness for, the unlawful possession. I need hardly say that I beat a hasty retreat—and there the matter rests, as far as I am concerned.

Stole has taken up warmly the principles of the Society for the Unification of Christendom (to which I wish every success), and is actively engaged in founding a branch in Westerly,—an effort which, as yet, has only resulted in his being set down by the general evangelical public as a Jesuit, and by Bishop Quodlibet as "a mere visionary"—a man

labouring under a temporary and harmless hallucination, which, in the opinion of Canon Fungus, can only be thoroughly cured by matrimony. But this is a very drastic remedy at the best; and it is, moreover, one to which I think Stole is now conscientiously opposed, on other and higher grounds than mere curative ones.

CHAPTER XIV.

FINAL.

"Vivitur ex rapto; non hospes ab hospite tutus."—Ovid.

It only remains for me to say a few words about my friend Joel. I met his mother a few days ago in the Main Street; and, after the customary interchange of small-talk about the weather and what not, I said that I was glad to hear the news of her son's intention of going into the Church.

She became dignified and distant on the instant. "I trust," she said, "that we are all in the Church—Joel among the number."

You could have knocked me down with a feather. I acknowledged the slip by correcting it on the spur of the moment, as best I could—but very tamely, as it turned out.

"Yes, of course; I should have said going into the Ministry,"—and I uttered the last word as if I clearly intended to give it a capital M. The result, even then, was not satisfactory.

She spoke at me now, slowly and with frigid distinctness of utterance — "He is about to take Holy Orders: perhaps you mean that." This was as much as to say that, though there might be such a thing as a Baptist minister, or a Wesleyan minister, or a Presbyterian or a Unitarian one, her son was not of these, but of the Episcopal Church as by law established. I felt that the best thing I could do would be to beat a retreat as expeditiously as possible.

I came across the young gentleman himself, later on in the day, standing in the club porch. The place was crowded with sporting men, who had arrived for the coming races. Since the death of old Major-

General Bynge-Hudson, Hinch had triumphed all along the line; and these races were now established on a firm basis—very much to the gratification of other natives besides Joel Fungus. I thought to slip by unobserved, but did not succeed.

"Holloa! I say, old chap, how long have you been here? Since yesterday only! Come up for the races, of course?"

"Well, no," I said, "not exactly."

"Well, partially. Going to combine business and pleasure. Come in. You're not a member? Oh, never mind; I'll put your name down as a visitor. That'll be all right. What'll you take? Have you anything on?"

"Nothing, thanks,—I haven't anything on. The fact is, I never bet."

A young fellow in breeches and gaiters, and of a drab hue all over, including his face and hair, took one foot off the parapet, and the horn handle of a riding-whip out of his

mouth, and coughed. I felt that there was a consensus of opinion developed on the instant, very much to my prejudice. The porch cleared as if by magic. I felt it absolutely incumbent on me to explain myself to Joel.

"Of course," I went on, "I don't pretend to say that it is a crime to go to a race, or even to bet."

"That's comforting," responded Joel, good-humouredly; "but I may tell you in confidence that it doesn't square with my governor's views. I wish it did."

"What I feel is," said I, gaining courage, "that races are the cause of so much evil. They lead to dissipation of all kinds, encourage drinking" (I felt I had him there), "and foster crime, and—and—bring ruin on so many promising young men. Statistics most unquestionably show——"

"Oh, my dear fellow, draw it mild," Joel interrupted. "Statistics are simply all

humbug. You can prove almost anything by statistics."

"I have heard that before from those who have found them inconvenient," I remarked, throwing, as I flattered myself, an effective tinge of irony into the words. It was lost on Joel. He rattled away.

"Well, it is quite true, all the same. Look here! Suppose a race is timed to start at a certain hour. I go by my own ticker. If it is fast or slow, never mind; I know where I am, and I can allow for it. But if I have developed a fad for statistics, I rush into a clock-shop, and I come out of it no wiser than I went in. Why, it is any hour at all by statistics inside; and to make matters worse, the confounded clocks all speak at once."

Joel's theory had something in it both comic and plausible. I laughed, and said so. He was pleased, flattered, and encouraged by the admission.

We went in.

"Now that you have got into temptation," said he, "you may as well yield to it with a good grace. I'll take you fifteen to one against Bluebottle."

"Well, thanks very much; but, as I said before, I'm not a betting man."

Joel looked at me solemnly, both hands deep in his trousers-pockets, and balancing himself mentally on his heels. It struck me that he was on the point of consigning me, in his own estimation, to a point very low down indeed. The tainted moral atmosphere must have had a very bad effect upon me; because, instead of boldly maintaining the opinions which I held on these matters, I made the halting excuse that it was "too risky a business."

"That's a popular error," said Joel, promptly.

"If the best horse always won," I remarked, tentatively.

"Why, there you are—that's just it. If he did, it would spoil the whole thing, my dear man. But the risk is governed entirely by the theory of averages: it is heavily handicapped by a mathematical certainty, if you only know what you are about. So that, for all practical purposes, risk does not exist, or at least should not count."

"But there must surely be big losses, or there would not be big gains. There are two sides to every question."

"There's the mistake again. I go in for belief in only one side. Of course, if there are two people, in that sense there may be two sides; but a practical man should be content with singleness of purpose. Being only a unit, you should be satisfied with one; and, in racing matters, all you have got to do is to see and be on the right side."

"Well, I confess myself a duffer. I don't know much about it," I said, apologetically. "Is it true that a fellow, if he is smart

enough, can so bet as to actually insure himself against loss—even though he should not win? I never could understand that."

"It is—quite true. All you want is to be able to make a book. I was explaining it all to-day to my sisters, and I think Dolly took in the theory. Ethel is not near so smart. I put things in a general way, thus. Take my governor. There are, we'll say, three events to come off—the Mitre, the Deanery, the Archdeaconry. Well, I back him heavily to win on the first event; somebody else backs him against me for the next event, and the next. I go back on the transaction with another set of fellows, and reverse the process; or perhaps I spot him to get placed for the third—and so on. I may realise a good thing, but I can't be hit if I am posted up. There are other things which come in as factors, of course," he added, seeing that I looked bewildered.

"Yes, the dark horse and the straight tip,"

I edged in. "I rather fancy the straight tip 'bosses the show.'" And here I felt myself endeavouring to look as if I knew a thing or two—which I really didn't, as his so-called explanation made matters worse with regard to bookmaking. Did he mean to mystify me?

"Very often," he continued, "the terms are synonymous. You know Chedder—the Reverend John Chedder? Clever chap enough, though the Bishop don't half like him since he declined to go on the deputation against the races. Well, I scored off him some time ago, and netted a tenner. It is a case exactly in point. He backed my governor's chances of the Scottowe preferment. I went for a dark horse—Tinkler. You know Tinkler. I got the straight tip from the Bishop's butler, who does a good deal on the quiet in the sporting line; and, by Jove, sir, Tinkler came in first—had a walk over! Governor wasn't even a bad

second. Stole and a lot more were simply out of it. The dark horse and the straight tip are practically interchangeable terms. If you have the straight tip you know the dark horse, and *vice versâ*. In this instance Tinkler was the dual agent, and did the trick."

The last word was well chosen in reference to Joel's part of the business, as it appeared to me; but I did not say so, because (as I persuaded myself to believe) we were interrupted by a new-comer.

"Oh, here's Towls!" cried Joel, "our senior wrangler. That's the boy to make a book, and to explain all about the process. Towls, my friend Nondum; Nondum, Mr Towls." He bowed, and so did I; then, to get over the awkwardness of not knowing what to say all of a sudden, we shook hands most cordially.

Frequently, even after having had time to think, I am at a loss for talk, and my

embarrassment was increased on this occasion by the firm conviction that I was looked upon as an outsider in the great social and pecuniary issues which bring about these sporting events. I was among these men by accident, but not of them by initiatory rites.

An inspiration seemed to strike Towls. "Let me put you down for a 'sweep,' Mr Nondum. It's only a sov. Our mutual friend Joel is in for it. Try your luck. Innocence and virtue are sometimes rewarded in this world."

I yielded — to avoid ridicule. It was cowardly, but I here openly confess it. From that day to this I have never repeated the questionable proceeding.

But the curious part of the story remains to be told. I won that "sweep." It came to thirty pounds. I could hardly believe my eyes when Towls sent me a cheque with a congratulatory letter. The money recouped me for expenditure on wedding-presents to

Mrs Bynge-Hudson, Mrs Tinkler, and Mrs Bateman; and I have registered a vow that I will undertake a penitential journey to hear Joel preach his first sermon, no matter in what quarter of the globe that interesting event may take place.

THE END.

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